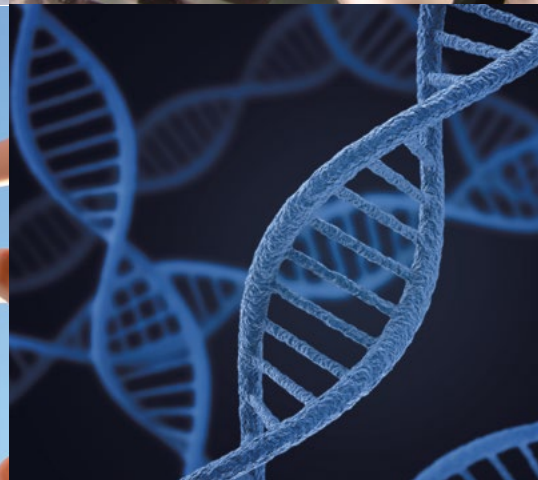




The Praesta Insight Pieces



PRAESTA INSIGHTS



Foreword

When Praesta’s founding partners first planned their new business, they were determined to create a firm that would be wholly focused on their collective passion – harnessing the power of executive coaching to help people and the organisations they work for achieve their ambitions and aspirations. We wanted the firm that opened on July 4th 2005 – Independence Day! - to achieve a reputation for professional excellence. We were also determined not to rest on the laurels earned in our legacy business. After all, our clients evolve and develop, so it was right that we should too: we owed it to them to be as good as we could be.

Our coaches begin with the foundation of senior careers, have undergone advanced coaching qualifications and then commit to on going development through supervision, peer sessions and annual international conferences. As we bring in new coaches to grow the firm and take the practice forwards you will see some new faces, while longer serving members continue to be active and bring significant value to our clients and the firm through their extensive experience.

We have coached and mentored in excess of 6,500 senior executives and 100 executive teams. In addition to our UK business we have member firms in France, Ireland, Germany, Hungary, Turkey, Singapore and UAE. To harness the collective experience gained through our client assignments we decided to provide some practical – as opposed to theoretical - thought leadership in our market place. We began to publish practical, thought-provoking Praesta Insights on topical subjects that would inform and engage our clients. As they are busy people, we set ourselves the challenge of boiling the content of these documents down to a fifteen minute read.

In this publication we have brought together a collation of our most popular Praesta Insights, covering topics such as developing resilient teams, continuity and succession, board players and living leadership to name a few.

We hope you enjoy as much as we have enjoyed the journey with our clients to enable us to share these insights.

Edward Dulson
Chairman and Partner, on behalf of everyone at Praesta

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The Resilient Team



2007

Faster Faster

Thriving in a faster faster world

by Heather Dawson (2005-2013)

PRAESTA INSIGHTS

Work, at senior levels, in the 21st century has accelerated – many executives find themselves in what we call a “faster-faster” world, with unrelenting pressure, global travel and high performance expectations. Yet, contrary to popular belief, many individuals thrive in this pressured environment. How is this possible? We decided to explore this question and draw together what other executives could learn from those who cope well, because this shift to a “faster-faster world” has been so noticeable in our coaching practice.

But wait a minute – have things really changed?

Some point out that senior executives were expected to work long hours in the 20th century, often in highly pressured environments. But executives tell us that the nature and pace of work has changed noticeably in more recent years:

- There is far less time for leaders to settle into bigger and more demanding roles.
- These roles hold challenges that are more varied, numerous and complex.
- Decision making must be faster, leaving little time for consultation and reflection.
- Information from voicemail, email, text messages, websites and “hard copy” documents can deluge senior executives and distract them from thinking and maintaining strategic focus.
- Boundaries between work and personal time are more porous. Many executives have global responsibilities in different time zones, their sleep and work patterns are disrupted by world travel, and there is a creeping sense of needing to be “available” constantly, with the help of communication technology.

It is notable that those who thrive in this new environment appear to see these trends as opportunities – opportunities to move quickly on major initiatives, to engage with employees and customers around the world using today’s exciting communication technology, and to build new businesses. So, what skills, disciplines and attitudes underpin the executive who thrives in this faster-faster world?

Key skills and disciplines

We have observed that there are certain skills and disciplines that allow some individuals not only to survive but even to thrive. The first is a classic set of skills that every successful executive must have. These nonnegotiable skills have become even more critical given the sheer complexity and speed of business today. They provide the foundation for success. But there is also another set of disciplines that gives some executives the edge, allowing them to thrive in a faster-faster world. This paper explores these “faster-faster” disciplines, starting with “shaping the role of work in one’s life”.

1. Shaping the role of work in one’s life

We have noticed that executives who believe “my life is my own” are a step ahead. They have clarity on the key tenets of their life – what is important to them, what they would like to achieve, and how they want to lead their lives. They may not have been successful all the time, but they approach their life and work with a positive attitude. They have a sense of choice about the role of their career in their life. One size does not fit all. Some are fulfilled by working hard in demanding jobs – and they have made that deliberate choice. For others, a different balance between work and family life is appropriate. Some protect weekends and holidays, others appreciate the flexibility of interweaving work and personal life throughout the day – for example, taking children to school, working, getting home early, and working late at night. The notion of uniformly separate times for work (e.g. 8am-6pm) and personal activities (e.g. evenings and weekends)

is shifting towards each individual finding a balance that works for him or her.

Whatever their personal rhythm, executives who can see choices feel liberated from the sense of “being done to” or out of control. They may not get all they ask for, but they are often surprised at what they can achieve.

2. Managing communication technologies

In the early 2000s, many executives found themselves swamped by emails and voicemails. They were sucked into the middle of issues that really belonged to other executives or managers. Communication technology can draw executives into a level of detail that is unproductive, thus pushing decisions inappropriately up the line. Moreover, the ubiquitous “ccing” of email allows individuals to abdicate responsibility with the phrase “but we told you so”. There is now published evidence that interruptions – e.g. through emails, voicemails, instant messaging – reduce productivity. Not surprisingly, then, some executives are beginning to think carefully about the signals they send out on how they wish their organisations to work with communication technology. By actively managing how they use these technologies themselves, they find they can enhance both their own productivity and their organisation’s. Modern technology has increased the pressure to “be on call” or be available all the time, but our experience is that those who thrive in the faster-faster world make very clear where their boundaries are. At times, they switch off “being available”, by turning off their mobile phones and email.

3. Finding time to think and focus

Senior executives’ days are typically splintered – one-minute conversations, two-hour meetings, social chit chat, a 15-minute catch up with a direct report, a 30-minute video conference, and so on. In this world, executives are finding it more difficult to focus their attention and energy on a single issue, person or activity. In spite of this, and because of it, carving out time to think and focus remains critical to the success of any executive.

Indeed, evidence is mounting from research that “our hyper-connected world is making it difficult to think”. First, technology has the capacity to overwhelm people with information from multiple sources. Second, the speed of today’s communication technologies encourages people to think that it is “good” to make decisions faster, respond more quickly to issues, and get projects done faster. Slow is equated with “bad”.

We have also seen increasing numbers of executives concerned about their ability to multi-task. Indeed, some see multi-tasking as a key part of their success. Work is defined as skimming from one topic to another, in a vortex of emails, voicemails and text messages, while moving from one short meeting or conversation

to another. Our experience indicates, however, that this approach to work – operating in mini slices of time and constantly multi-tasking – is at times useful but is not a prerequisite for success at senior levels.

In this fractured working life, it is even more critical that executives find time for deep focus. This enables them to step back and reflect thoughtfully on a business issue, on how they are doing, or on a particularly knotty problem, without distractions. This focused time has a different quality from checking off a to-do list or reacting to what others are saying or doing around one.

Executives have told us about some of the approaches that have helped them find time to focus: changing the physical environment (e.g. working away from a cluttered desk), engaging in conversation/dialogue with a trusted colleague/friend/mentor, writing out pros and cons, going for a walk, working half a day at home. Whatever the approach, finding time to focus and think pays dividends with greater clarity and perspective and renewed energy.

4. Leading amidst uncertainty and ambiguity

This is the ability to lead when one does not have all the answers, to make decisions without all the information, and to keep going amidst constantly changing circumstances. Executives who respond well to change appear to be comfortable with “not knowing”. They display flexibility and adaptability in more than one sense. The Centre for Creative Leadership in the US has identified three types of flexibility:

- Emotional flexibility. Ability to vary one’s approach in dealing with emotions. This involves being aware of one’s own emotions as well as the emotions of others, balancing one’s doubts with a positive attitude, and combining listening/talking with directing/making decisions.
- Cognitive flexibility. Ability to look at things in different ways. This means continually watching for the need to change approach, and then creating the appropriate strategy or response.
- Dispositional flexibility. Ability to display realistic optimism in the midst of change and, at the same time, tolerate ambiguity. Adaptability allows leaders to “let go” of the strain of always being certain. They learn the skill of knowing what they can and cannot control. It is as if they have the ballast needed to remain steady as they are knocked and buffeted from all sides.

5. Creating one’s own oxygen tent

Executives who know how to maintain their own mental, physical and emotional vitality cope more effectively with the stresses of their jobs. They build in time for their “oxygen tent” or “oxygen pocket” – e.g. a hobby, a physical endeavour, a cultural

The must-have foundation skills

One, perhaps surprising, insight from our conversations with executives is that thriving in a faster-faster world means really mastering some basic, classic management skills. These skills need practice and updating as responsibilities and circumstances change. Successful leaders master all three:

1. Build capability around them

Those who thrive in a faster-faster world recognise and act on the following principles in building a team:

- They cannot do it all by themselves.
- They understand where, as leaders, they can add value.
- They know when to be hands-off or hands-on.

With these principles and skills, leaders can shape a team with complementary skills. This enables them to focus their energy on the right issues, and it gives their colleagues the space to take on responsibilities.

2. Distinguish clearly what matters

Without question, a senior executive needs to master the skill of sorting and synthesising information to get to the heart of an issue. This includes:

- Asking questions so they really understand what is going on, what colleagues think, what the options are

- Listening carefully to colleagues, clients and advisors to help build an understanding of what is important
- Stepping back and asking oneself “what is going on here?”, “what matters?”

Many of our clients appreciate that they need time to do this, either by themselves or in conversations with colleagues. What they find challenging is carving out that time (see faster-faster skill number 3: Finding time to think and focus).

3. Plan and think ahead

This skill may seem selfevident, but it definitely helps to manage stress. It includes:

- Understanding when key initiatives will need attention
- Identifying important events and then managing one’s time and energy around these
- Managing the expectations of colleagues, friends and family.

Example: creating a picture of what’s coming up

One executive we know carries with him an A4 notebook containing a hand-written matrix. The left hand column lists key projects and stakeholders while the top shows the months. In the body of the matrix, he writes key points such as when he needs to see someone, project milestones, etc. Thus, at a glance he can see where the stress points are and whether an important initiative is behind or ahead. This simple tool for thinking ahead may not be for everyone but it will work for some.

interest or charitable work. An oxygen tent, separate from holidays and normal family activities, gives executives energy and refreshes them at many levels – mentally, physically and spiritually. It is an activity for themselves and no-one else. It can be thought of as a form of “enlightened self interest”, providing a space for renewal in the hectic business of leading organisations. Put simply, without a chance to recharge, the battery runs down.

6. Understanding one’s trigger point

Finally, even those who master all the disciplines mentioned so far will hit upon the occasional hellish day, when they simply feel overwhelmed. Some executives have found ways to deal with such stressful moments.

The key is understanding one’s “trigger point”. As Edward Hallowell puts it in his book Crazy Busy, this is when we move from the C-state (clear, calm, cool, collected, consistent, concentrated) to the F-state (frenzied, frantic, flustered). In the F-state, we “lose it”. We know it is coming when we feel we are about to snap, or sense we are running with “empty” on the fuel tank gauge. If we understand what can bring us to this point – lack of sleep, too many back-to-back meetings, days of constant interruptions and demands – we can figure out how to avoid flipping.

So, how can we anticipate and deal with such trigger points? Of course, getting enough sleep and eating well is a good start. But what some executives also find helpful in moments of feeling overwhelmed is going for a short walk (even 5-10 minutes) to clear their head, taking a few minutes between meetings to call a friend or partner, going to get a glass of water, or talking to a colleague for a few minutes. In other words, in the midst of an unrelenting day, they find they can regain their composure by pausing, changing pace, and varying the activity – even if only for a few minutes.

Research on the interplay between our emotions and the neural and endocrine processes provides a fascinating basis for what happens when we hit a trigger point or stressful time in our day. Our limbic system (thalamus, amygdala, hypothalamus, insula) regulates our emotions by responding to what our senses tell us. As an older part of the human brain, it is quite powerful. The cerebral cortex, on the other hand, is the centre for thinking, discernment, making choices and judging. When in balance, the circuitry works between the limbic system and cerebral cortex and we are able to register how we feel about a situation. We can evaluate, make decisions and feel balanced. In comparison, when under stress, negative emotions can cause the circuitry to break down. We lose attention, balance and perspective and make poor choices.

Closing thoughts

Clearly there are many skills to be mastered as a leader – including some that we have not discussed here, such as being able to create a vision, inspire people to pursue it, and ensure that key processes are in place. But our conversations with executives have convinced us that there are distinctive sets of skills and disciplines that can be developed in order to thrive in the faster-faster world of the 21st century.

Some practical things to try out today

- Carve out 1-2 hours fortnightly in the diary to think, reflect or discuss issues with a colleague without interruption
- Find a colleague, advisor, coach or mentor whose judgement and experience you respect. Use this person as a sounding board, to help you step back and focus on what really matters.
- If your assistant is not already screening and placing your emails in priority folders, start today. A PA can screen all emails and put them in folders – e.g. check urgently, action needed, and reading. Design your own categories.
- Ask yourself how you are using communication technologies. What example are you sending to the organisation? Are you, for example, answering emails at midnight, or reacting too quickly to non-urgent requests?
- Build in time for your ‘oxygen tent’ – a hobby, a sport activity, cultural pursuit – that is separate from holidays.

2008

Riding the Rapids

How to navigate through turbulent times

by Peter Shaw (2005-To Date) & Jane Stephens (2007-2013)

PRAESTA INSIGHTS

Good leaders know how to manage periods of change, but what happens when that change is sustained and driven by forces outside their control, and when its scale and pace is unprecedented? Sudden changes in business fortunes combined with high levels of uncertainty and ambiguity are extremely difficult to manage, and have knock-on effects throughout the private, public and third sectors.

Leaders today are faced with intense work and personal challenges that can cause them to question their normal leadership approach. As a coaching practice, we have seen the impact of the current economic environment on leaders – on their ability to make decisions, on their confidence, and on the way they work with others.

We have spoken to leaders who have been working through times of extended turbulence. We asked them what they had learned from their experiences. What are the fundamentals that matter? What can you do that ensures you continue to perform at your best? This booklet shares their insights, supported by our own observations of leadership behaviour and relevant research. We hope it will stimulate your thinking about what you can do to remain an effective leader despite, and sometimes because of, sustained periods of challenge and uncertainty.

Leadership essentials

Many of the characteristics identified as important are leadership fundamentals. However, they require a particular focus at times like these – they are the easiest to lose when under extreme pressure, and they make the greatest difference to effective leadership.

Strong leaders during turbulent times:

1. Maintain their core attitudes and beliefs, no matter how much pressure they come under.
2. Tackle each new challenge clearly and calmly, leading from the front to inspire those around them.

3. Know to look after themselves to maintain stamina and well-being for a lengthy and often exhausting period.



1. Maintaining core attitudes and beliefs

Leaders talk of being under pressure to make uncomfortable decisions, wanting to find all the answers themselves and feeling overwhelmed by the enormity of their challenge.

How sustained pressure can make you feel...

- Fear of failure: taking everything personally, and paralysed by the risks involved in every decision
- Lose heart: not believing that things will get better
- Worry about lost reputation: focusing on how people think you are coping here and now, not on long term results
- Lower energy: falling energy levels both in yourself and in those around you

It is critical to hold on to and encourage the attitudes and beliefs that drive your leadership approach. Experience shows that paying attention to three things makes a difference – doing what you think is right; remaining positive; and being honest about yourself.

Do what you think is right

A common learning is that focusing on doing what you believe to be ‘the right thing’ gives you a sense of personal integrity, self worth and even accomplishment, no matter what the final outcome. What you regard as ‘right’ can come from your own values and experiences, or from having considered the perspective of trusted advisors. Using your sense of what is right to inform your decisions gives an underlying consistency to your approach that others can identify with, and helps to build trust and loyalty.

Leaders today are faced with intense work and personal challenges that can cause them to question their normal leadership approach. As a coaching practice, we have seen the impact of the current economic environment on leaders – on their ability to make decisions, on their confidence, and on the way they work with others.

Be honest about yourself

During challenging times, it can be hard to admit what you cannot do; it can feel like an admission of failure. However, a consistent message is that being honest with yourself is a considerable leadership strength. In particular:

Focus your energy and time

Many leaders describe the pressure of feeling they have to do it all – that they should have all the answers and be able to solve everything on their own. This is reaching for the impossible, and can lead to overstretching yourself to breaking point, so:

- Know what things you do well, and accept the limits of your abilities. This realisation allows you to use the people around to best effect and fuels self confidence
- Recognise what you, and you alone, can uniquely do. Concentrate on this and delegate the rest.

Recognise when you may be about to ‘lose it’

Leaders talk of feeling disappointed, resentful, exhausted, angry or afraid during turbulent times. These are powerful emotions that fundamentally affect our ability to view things logically or to act rationally. If you feel yourself closing down, lacking confidence, blaming others or not listening you should:

- *Acknowledge your problem:* be honest with yourself that you are in danger of becoming emotionally overwhelmed and accept that it is affecting your judgment and behaviour

- *Evaluate the impact:* assess how important the situation is and how your reaction is affecting your work and the people around you
- *Step away:* take a break from the situation, however short. This can mean walking round the block, having a coffee, or deciding to delegate a task to someone else.

How intense pressure can affect you...

- **Being a rabbit in the headlights:** feeling stuck and unable to make a decision
- **Getting lost in the detail:** finding it easier to focus on the little things rather than longer term goals and the bigger picture
- **Going for a quick fix:** making decisions too fast without fully assessing the risks or wider implications
- **Feeling stampeded into action:** being too influenced by people who appear confident or more knowledgeable than you

Cultivate a Positive Mindset

Being positive means believing that no matter how intractable the challenge may appear, there is a way out of it. It is about focusing on what can be done, not what has gone wrong.

Research shows that some simple techniques can be highly effective in cultivating a positive mindset. For example, if you find yourself with free flowing negative thoughts, it is worth deliberately trying to contain and then stop them. Or, if you are unable to see a way forward, try generating options without then immediately dismissing or editing them. How many ways can you think of to get out of the situation? By doing this you realise you have choices, no matter how difficult they may be. It is this sense of choice that gives the psychological freedom to look ahead.

Leaders emphasise the importance of having grounded optimism rather than false optimism. Grounded optimism requires a constructive mindset combined with a healthy realism about what is going on.



2. Tackling each new challenge

When faced with day to day decisions and issues during extreme turbulence, the most effective leaders continue to define their role, and their success, within the context of the bigger picture. They also have a sense of who they are and what they stand for, which goes beyond their current job. They therefore resist being subsumed by any specific situation or crisis.

They do this by focusing on four things that make a difference – keeping a sense of perspective; setting priorities; having the right people around them; and leading from the front.

Keep a Sense of Perspective

Losing perspective is one of the first things that leaders have experienced during such challenging, unpredictable times – being unable to put each issue or decision in context, understand how real a threat it represents, assess the scale of its impact or decide if it has long term implications.

Under pressure it is easy to feel drawn to action, and the normal ‘thinking time’ can seem like a luxury. However counter intuitive it may feel, it is critical to step back to think, even for a short time.

How do you put things into perspective while maintaining the necessary pace of decision making? A powerful lesson for many has been the value of having the best inputs possible. You need quick access to information to test your judgement and make focused decisions. You also need to ensure you stay widely informed, even when under pressure, to keep perspective and your antennae tuned. This may require searching wider and deeper for opinions, data and ideas. When gathering information, it is critical to do it selectively and with a clear purpose that will help you take action. Avoid the common pitfall of ‘paralysis by analysis’ where continual research becomes a substitute for decision making and action. You cannot sit in your bunker and fall back just on previous experience – it will not be enough.

In turbulent times leaders stress the need to stay focused on four fundamental ways of informing decisions:

- *Get the best data and information you can:* you might have to work much harder for the right intelligence, by challenging what you are told and sometimes spending the resources to get the best external help. During difficult times people may tell you what you want to hear and put a gloss on things.

- *Listen to others’ views:* you should actively seek opinions widely throughout your organisation and beyond. It helps to discuss issues, get fresh thinking and listen to a broad range of people – not a narrow few. Try to remain open minded and interested in opinions to avoid shutting people down who may think you have already decided on the answers. Not only will you pick up new ideas, but you will stay attuned and in touch. This will be invaluable when you need to act quickly.
- *Have personal sounding boards:* make sure you have some trusted people to talk to - a safe space where you can speak your mind, say the unsayable, think the unthinkable, and talk it through out loud. This will help get your mind straight. It will also ensure you are exploring the issues fully. Some of these people should come from outside the organisation to give you a broader perspective and a truly separate place to think. Often people find an executive coach helpful at this time.
- *Create personal space:* regularly find places to think clearly on your own and gain inspiration, such as going for a long walk. The rest and space this creates can leave room for a breakthrough idea to come to you.

A senior leader in a media company

was faced with an extreme threat to his organisation’s reputation and future. He knew that when under significant stress he tended to become aggressive and go into denial. To counteract this he relied on a small group of people around him whom he could trust to tell him the truth without making him feel in the wrong. They were also the people from whom he felt most able to accept the truth.

Set Clear Priorities

As well as seeking others’ views, a leader ultimately has to make decisions and set direction for the organisation. This is particularly difficult when the day to day reality is constantly changing and unpredictable. It is easy to get sucked into lurching from one crisis to another, to become a firefighter. The most effective leaders during turbulence are as clear as possible with themselves and others about where they want to take the organisation, and what everyone needs to do to get there. At the same time they have the flexibility to adapt quickly when circumstances or perspectives change in the light of new information.

When focusing the organisation, leaders tell us of the need to hold their nerve in the face of panic or pressure from others. It is about finding the courage

to prioritise what will make the biggest difference to long term success, and sometimes to choose between a set of equally unattractive options. These decisions may prove unpopular if they don’t result in immediate action or results, but, having invested in being informed, trust your judgement.

Many leaders find that turbulent times open up opportunities to make radical change. Things that have seemed impossible or unthinkable may now not only look feasible, but necessary.

The Finance Director of a UK Industrial plc

described feeling overwhelmed (“frozen in the headlights”) by the scale of the problems he faced. He felt as if he had an insurmountable mountain to climb and he lost the ability to make decisions or move forward. To overcome this, he set himself a clear timeframe for action of 80 days, with specific goals to achieve. Suddenly everything felt more manageable and he was re-energised, with a restored sense of decisiveness and a positive attitude.

Draw on the right team

During extreme challenge your team needs to be high performing, with the right people in the right roles. Your team needs to be loyal, committed, aligned and collaborative. A team can sometimes develop its most innovative ideas when put under pressure.

It is crucial to be surrounded by people who are both ‘on side’ and able to openly disagree during debates before reaching agreement about what to do. It is your role to create the environment where people feel encouraged to be honest and to question your views and decisions when appropriate. It is not a place or a time for ‘yes people’ or for dysfunction within your team.

If the pressure and uncertainty reveals flaws or gaps in experience in the team, leaders need to make the necessary changes and make them quickly.

You do not have the luxury of time to ‘wait and see’. It can be painful, but is essential.

The need for constant, rapid reactions to the changing environment may occasionally require a smaller group to make specific strategic decisions – for example, the Chairman, CEO and Finance Director. Any such small group needs to be explicit in defining why and how it is operating, and to ensure it keeps the wider senior team informed and involved as much as possible.

Pulling together under real pressure can result in

amazing creativity and output. Pressure on the group to think the unthinkable can force creativity and ideas.

Be a visible leader

During times of uncertainty, stress and panic, executives have seen how people need to see a leader who is calm, focused and inspiring. You cannot do this from behind a closed door. This is a time for visible, personal leadership of your people – for keeping everyone informed, and for publicly setting the tone of how you expect your whole organisation to react and to behave.

During extreme uncertainty, it is unlikely you will have many answers for people’s questions. However, experience has shown the dangers of going silent with the organisation and spending too much time in a huddle with your immediate team. Silence breeds rumour and negative energy. People need information to be able to understand where to focus, and to prioritise, and to offer ideas. It is vital to communicate constantly, and to keep the dialogue open. Keep talking, not only in meetings but when walking around your organisation. If there is not a clear answer you can always explain your direction, what you are focusing on to solve any problems, and what you want people to be working on right now to keep things on course.

As a leader, be conscious that everything about you gives a message to your organisation; not only your words, but your posture, facial expression, tone of voice and appearance. People will look for any signals that you feel things are out of control. The perception of your mood will spread like wildfire and will often become distorted through gossip. When a CEO asked his chairman what was the single most important thing he should be doing, the reply was “smile”. Many refer to the ‘cheerleader’ element of a leader’s role in turbulent times, which may require putting on a leadership mask. This is extremely difficult when your working environment is visible to others, and makes finding safe, personal space during the day all the more critical.



3. Looking after yourself

Leading an organisation, its people and yourself through radical changes and pressures requires a high level of stamina and personal strength. To many leaders, focusing on their own well-being can seem

like self indulgence. They explain how it can feel as if every moment matters, and that it is important to

dig in, to work all the hours you can to ensure the organisation and the people are on track. This may work in a short term crisis. The danger is that, if you don't look after yourself over the longer term, you can lose perspective and start to lack the energy to make the tough decisions. This may be exacerbated by the fact that, under pressure, many people find it difficult to sleep, and suffer the adverse effects of sleep deprivation.

There is growing evidence that looking after yourself fundamentally affects a leader's effectiveness and ability to be at their best. It is not an optional extra; it is the foundation for your leadership success. Being in good shape will mean you will have the inner resources to dig deep into your energy and resilience, and not let the tank run dry. This evidence points to four areas of well-being that are well worth considering. Each gives you a hinterland that allows you to succeed. You should assess which areas are most important to you, and how you can ensure they remain part of your life even during the busiest times:

- *Physical well-being:* building stamina fuels creative and mental energy. It involves a combination of personal fitness and relaxation time. One CEO explained the impact of improving his health: "A few years ago I was heavier than I am today. Losing weight has helped me cope with difficult situations. I am totally clear that mental capacity is affected by physical capacity".
- *Emotional well-being:* finding a state of equilibrium helps you to remain calm and balanced. For some this is supported by their relationships; for others by confidence in their sense of self-worth and unique value.
- *Intellectual well-being:* engaging your mind in something different from everyday work, no matter how trivial, can be a source of relief and can stimulate creativity.
- *Spiritual well-being:* knowing what matters most in your life keeps things in perspective – whether it comes from enduring interests or relationships, or is rooted in beliefs and faith.

In summary...

Being a leader right now is tough and exhausting. You have to learn to live with a higher level challenge, pressure and stress as a normal part of working life, rather than a short term crisis. It requires resilience, stamina and focus. Resilient leaders – those who are physically and mentally strong – are able to accept change and also to learn from it and to thrive under pressure. They regard the challenges as an opportunity, a chance to learn and to deepen their experience. Their ability to be flexible, positive and energetic comes to the fore and separates them from other leaders.

Ask yourself how ready you are to lead through the turbulence to come. Then start work today on taking back control of your life. If you do, you can emerge stronger and wiser.



2010

What Makes a Great Chair in the Public Sector?

by Hilary Douglas (2010-To Date)

PRAESTA INSIGHTS

In the UK public sector there is a wide range of bodies of different kinds that support the business of Government. Their nature and numbers may change over time, but they remain an important part of the landscape. Praesta clients who are Chairs of such bodies have wanted to explore with us the key ingredients for success in the role.

We have talked to a number of Chairs and Chief Executives with experience of both the public and the private sectors, and have drawn on key reports and publications about Board governance. To summarise our findings:

- The role of Chair, whether in the public or the private sectors, requires a distinct set of skills;
- A positive relationship between the Chair and the Chief Executive is critical to organisational success;
- The Chair must help the organisation to get full benefit from the non-executives on the Board;
- Private sector norms of good governance are highly relevant to the public sector and a good place from which to start; and
- A Chair with private sector experience will be struck by specific differences in the public sector, arising from the role of Ministers and Parliament, the existence of multiple stakeholders and objectives, and a high degree of public scrutiny. The successful Chair needs to understand these differences and have strategies for handling them.

The fundamental principles for an effective Chair

There are many different types of public body and it is impossible to generalise on every detail of their constitution. However, all of our interviewees agree that the fundamentals are those that apply in any sector:

- **Ensure clear governance**
- **Use your “levers” effectively**
- **Review Board performance regularly**
- **Recognise the distinct skills required of the Chair**
- **Invest in relationships – especially with your Chief Executive and non-executive Board members.**

If you are already an experienced Chair, these principles may be second nature and your main interest may be in the sections at the end of the booklet. But a quick refresh may still be useful!

Ensure clear governance

Corporate governance is the system by which organisations are directed and controlled. It describes the relationship between the various players at the top of the organisation, the structure through which they operate and make themselves accountable to stakeholders, and the processes by which they make decisions. The corporate governance framework for businesses in the UK operates:

- Through legislation, particularly the Companies Act;
- Through regulation, and through the Combined Code which is the responsibility of the Financial Reporting Council.

For the public sector, an Independent Commission chaired by Sir Alan Langlands produced “The Good Governance Standard for Public Services” in 2004.

All agree it is essential to clarify the distinct leadership roles played by the Chair and the Chief Executive. This can be even more important if the Chair has previously held a Chief Executive role and has limited experience as a non-executive. The standard set of assumptions would be:

- The Chair and Board appoint the Chief Executive;
- The Chair runs the Board; the Chief Executive runs the organisation;
- The Chair facilitates from the wings, the Chief Executive drives from centre stage;
- The Chair leads the Board, in conjunction with the executive, in working out the strategic direction of the organisation and the priorities for resources. The Chief Executive implements;
- The Chair and the Board monitor organisational and executive performance, and ensure accountability to stakeholders;
- The Chair provides cover for the Chief Executive when the going gets tough: if the Chief Executive does not deserve that cover, the Chair may need to consider dismissal.

Board Member:
“The Chair leads us in constructively challenging the executive, searching for the unknown unknowns in terms of risk to the business, and ensuring that the Board is measuring the outcomes that matter.”

Chair:
“Ideally, you decide what powers are to be reserved to the Board and devolve the rest, rather than try to specify everything that is to be devolved.”

Chair:
“I have found that close reading of the Combined Code has been extremely helpful in my work in the public sector.”

Use your levers effectively

With these guidelines in mind, the Chair can review the current state of the organisation using the levers which properly belong with the Board.

In particular, it is the Chair’s responsibility to:

- Appoint and appraise the Chief Executive;
- Clarify the responsibilities of the Board and the executive, and ensure that everyone understands them;

- Set the forward agenda for the Board to focus on the key strategic and business issues;
- Ensure that the executive understand the objectives of papers commissioned for Board meetings;
- Encourage the non-executives to challenge the executive constructively, and guard against “groupthink”;
- Review the cycle of non-executive appointments to the Board and plan ahead for opportunities to fill gaps in experience /expertise.

In planning Board agendas, the Chair also considers:

- Is there clarity on the performance measures to be reviewed at Board meetings?
- Does the Board have the information it needs to support horizon-scanning and decision-making?
- Is adequate time allowed for the Board to review risks and agree strategies for managing them?
- Does succession planning get discussed and is the Board satisfied of the arrangements for senior staff appointments and performance management?

Depending on the circumstances, the Chair may want to take soundings with a mentor or trusted colleague on how to exercise these levers most effectively. This may also be the moment to get an independent assessment by commissioning a formal Board effectiveness review.

Chair:
“My predecessor allowed the Chief Executive to determine the agenda for Board meetings. The result was overlong papers and presentations which prevented us from discussing the key strategic issues. I have changed that.”

Chair:
“Looking back, I should have sat down when I first took up post, and consciously used the set of Board responsibilities to take a systematic look at where we were and what we needed to act on.”

Regularly review Board performance

The Hogg Review of the UK Corporate Governance Code (2009) recommended amongst other things that there should be an external review of Board performance in UK listed companies every three years.

In parallel, the Walker Review of Corporate Governance in the banking industry noted that the general reputation of individuals considered for

Board-level appointments can override objective evaluation of the skills they bring. This is particularly true when it comes to highly-tuned listening and facilitation skills, and the ability to observe, interpret and draw conclusions about what people are saying or not saying when they attend the Board.

Board evaluation thus needs to address both the content of Board discussions, and the way that business is conducted, including process, skills mix, culture and behaviours. An astute Chair uses it as an opportunity to identify areas that need strengthening or approaching from a fresh perspective. It may also highlight areas where Board members have collective or individual development needs. A good Chair takes those development messages seriously.

Chief Executive:
“The Board review identified some lack of clarity about which decisions are reserved to the Board or require a formal input from them. We are now doing something about it.”

Chair:
“I find it helps to have regular one to ones with individual non-executives. Sometimes that is the best way to find out what is really on their minds and to encourage them to surface issues in the Board. It also provides a safe space to give feedback.”

Evaluation does not stop at the Board as a whole. In the private sector, there is a well-established process for reviewing the performance of the Chair. Once a year the nominated Senior Independent Director takes confidential views from all of the other non-executives as well as the Chief Executive, and uses the summary feedback for a 1-1 with the Chair. The Chair is expected to take that feedback seriously. In extreme circumstances, it may lead to a discussion about his/her future as Chair.

In the public sector, decisions on the future of the Chair rest with Ministers, but there is still scope for a process to allow Chairs to respond to feedback from colleagues. It is currently up to individual organisations to arrange this, whether using a senior non-executive as facilitator, or bringing in a third party. At least one of our interviewees has chosen to translate the private sector model across to the public sector body that he chairs, and to use the Deputy Chair to collect annual feedback.

Board Member:
“I was once on a Board of a business where the CEO became Chair and appointed the Finance Director as Chief Executive. The Chair could not let go, and in the end, the Board had to ask him to stand down.”

Chair:
“It does not work if there are competing egos. If the Chair is too prominent, the Chief Executive can be fatally undermined.”

Evaluation of Chief Executive performance has been the subject of some debate in recent years, in both the public and the private sectors. There is general recognition now that it is not sufficient to judge success by financial performance alone, important though this may be. The Board needs to agree what success would look like on a number of dimensions, such as strategy, culture, operations, and position comparative to competitors/benchmarks. They then need to agree how achievement will be monitored and measured, and how the views of employees and stakeholders will be taken into account. A good Chair will give regular informal feedback to the Chief Executive throughout the year and work with him/her on any development areas, but at least once a year there will be a formal process to determine remuneration, and to highlight any critical issues of concern to the Board.

Chair:
“It was my role to explain to our Chief Executive why the Board thought that he needed to move on, after 12 successful years in post.”

Chair:
“The Chief Executive has many fine qualities, but does not require his Directors to work as a team. I have had to tell him this is not acceptable to the Board”.

Recognise the skills required of a Chair

Good corporate governance does not ensure good Board performance, and the skills needed of executives and non-executives are not identical.

We asked our interviewees about the skills needed of an exemplary Chair, and their views coincided with the results of a survey conducted with 215 Directors in 2004 by Praesta’s predecessor, The Change Partnership. The respondents took it for granted that all Chairs would have certain skills such as

strategic thinking, personal presence and relationship management at the highest levels. In addition, though, they identified ten differentiators:

The ten differentiators

A good Board Chair:

- Gives guidance in private to the CEO as a mentor and sounding board, but does not undermine their responsibility for delivering the strategy;
- Guides the CEO on what should come to the Board and ensures that all Directors understand the context in which options are being discussed;
- Creates the conditions for long term success by promoting diversity of skills, experience and personal attributes amongst the Board Directors;
- Gives more or less time to the organisation at short notice, according to need, such as a major change of direction, or the arrival of a new CEO;
- Demonstrates the organisation’s core values to internal and external stakeholders, sets the tone of the organisation and communicates in an open and accessible way that inspires confidence;
- Has had previous non-executive experience in this or another organisation before becoming Chair;
- Has broadly-based rather than sector-specific experience;
- Is prepared to work at understanding the organisation and what it needs of the Chair;
- Is personally accountable for Board performance;
- Balances the need for the Board to address current issues, with the imperative of quality time to discuss key strategic and leadership matters concerned with future performance.

To combine all of these attributes requires a Chair who can see things from the CEO’s perspective; can act as coach and mentor; has moral authority and inspires confidence within the organisation; is committed to the organisation’s long-term success;

and is an exceptional communicator. The Chair’s ultimate responsibility is to ensure an ordered CEO succession, and to take any necessary tough decisions about changing the leadership without destabilising the business. The Chair thus needs a huge degree of self-awareness, self-discipline and personal integrity, as well as the humility to do all of this without being centre stage. A sense of humour at the right moment can also help! Great Chairs are exceptional people.

Chair:
“I make it very clear to my Chief Executive that I won’t interfere in the running of the business, but I don’t expect my access to people, sites and clients to be closely controlled. I expect to be out there taking the temperature, and bringing any issues back for the Chief Executive to consider.”

Chair:
“My role in a Board discussion is to dock the ship successfully, having heard the debate and weighed the views expressed. It is a big mistake to come out with a personal view early in the discussion.”

What does that mean for the skills of the Chief Executive? He or she needs all the skills and attributes which go with effective leadership and management of any complex organisation, but also needs to know how to get the best from the Chair. If the Chair does not initiate, the Chief Executive needs to prompt a very early discussion on how they will work together, including the rules of engagement for Board meetings, the particular interests and working style of the Chair, and how the two of them will best divide their representative and ambassadorial roles outside the organisation.

In addition, the Chief Executive must think proactively about how to win the confidence of the other non-executives and to get the best from the executive’s interaction with the Board. Some of this is about hygiene factors, such as ensuring that the Board gets the information it wants, and that Board papers are well-written and circulated well ahead of time. Other aspects are more about relationship-building:

Chair:
“I once appointed a first time Chief Executive. He was a very good manager but I needed to coach him on how to interact with the Board, when to surface issues with them, and critically to recognise that Boards do not expect to be treated as rubber stamps.”

Chief Executive:
“Very early on, I spent time talking to each of the Board non-executives, finding out where their expertise and interest lay, as well as any concerns they might have about the organisation and the way it was run. I learned that it was best to share my emerging thinking with them before seeking decisions at the Board.”

Chief Executive:
“I had a concern that some of our non-executives with deep expertise were getting drawn into running with an issue, rather than providing advice to the executive and leaving them with responsibility to follow through. This caused a lot of confusion about accountability, and I had to seek opportunities to talk it through with them and the Chair.”

Invest in the Chair/CEO relationship

Writing down the respective roles and responsibilities of the Chair and Chief Executive is essential, but there is no alternative to working at the relationship on a day by day basis. In particular, many Chairs have a past history as successful Chief Executives, and may instinctively want to intervene, in what they consider to be the best interests of the organisation. Experienced Chairs tell us that they seek to avoid this trap by reviewing the number of days per week that they need to be in role, as someone without executive functions. In addition, they:

- Make sure there are regular opportunities for 1-1 conversations with the Chief Executive – not only about tasks but also about how best to work together;
- Discuss business issues by asking open questions of the Chief Executive, rather than seeking to impose an opinion;
- Ensure that any disagreements are discussed, and if at all possible, resolved, in private conversations or with the mediation of a trusted non-executive colleague;
- Work on the understanding that the Chief Executive will not spring surprises on the Board, nor seek to bounce them into decisions;
- Make sure that employees and stakeholders see the Chair and Chief Executive appearing in public together as one team.

Chair:
“It has to be an open and trusting relationship of mutual respect – even though there is the possibility that one day the Chair may need to fire the Chief Executive.”

Chief Executive:
“The Chief Executive role can be a very lonely one. On some topics there is no one else I can talk to. I look to the Chair for a receptive ear and constructive advice.”

Chair:
“A good relationship between the Chair and the Chief Executive is very beneficial for the company. If it does not exist, it is very difficult to compensate.”

What’s different in the public sector?

We spoke to Chairs and Chief Executives who had operated in both sectors. The consensus was that the good practice described above should be universal, but there are additional complexities in the public sector which Chairs need to be aware of.

Whereas a private sector Chair is appointed by the Board Directors, a public sector Chair is a ministerial appointment, and the Minister will expect the Chair to steer the Board and organisation to achieve the objectives set for them.

Depending on the nature of the organisation, the Minister may expect the Chair to take a close interest in the detail of the business, and may want regular progress meetings where each is accompanied by supporting officials. When this happens, the skilful Chair needs to build the relationship with the Minister, without undermining the leadership role of the Chief Executive within the organisation. In particular, he/she needs to ensure that any action items from meetings at the sponsor Department are clearly assigned to the executive team for follow up, and that the Chief Executive is not impeded in access to the key decision-makers and influencers.

If the Minister does not ask for regular progress meetings, the Chair nevertheless needs to remember that he/she is accountable to that Minister, and find ways of maintaining a relationship, so that any problems that arise - including any doubts about the performance of the Chief Executive - can be handled in a spirit of partnership. A Chair who floats free of the sponsoring Department may prosper as long as things are going well, but becomes vulnerable if they are not.

Chairs and Chief Executives in the public sector need to be sensitive to the political environment, and to public opinion. They need to establish strong working relationships with civil service counterparts and recognise when to consult on decisions. Ideally they will have complementary skills and support each other in getting the relationships right.

Other factors that affect the expectations of a public sector Chair are:

- It is not always easy to define who in the public sector equates to the private sector shareholder interest. Multiple stakeholders must be managed, and the Chair and Chief Executive need to agree between them who will lead in each case – or where they will consciously manage the relationship together;
- Chairs in the public sector may find that they are presumed to be the public face of the organisation. They may need to take a conscious decision on whether to accept the role, or seek to persuade others that this lies best with the Chief Executive;
- When it comes to reputation management, a public sector Chair can rarely stay out of the spotlight. The Chair needs to agree with the Chief Executive how they and the Board will be alerted to emerging issues in time to make an input, and be ready for media interest in everything that the organisation does or spends money on;
- Public sector Boards are expected to expose their proceedings to public scrutiny to a degree unfamiliar to many companies - and may moreover risk judicial review of some of the decisions they take.

Chair:
“No public body Chair could keep below the parapet when issues or allegations arise over value for money.”

Chief Executive:
“The Freedom of Information Act, the Public Accounts Committee and political accountability add another huge dimension to how things are managed, including risk.”

Chair:
“Chairs with predominantly private sector experience may need to familiarise themselves with public sector accounting conventions, the complexity of the regulatory environment, and the expectations of Ministers.”

Chair:
“Your appointment as Chair may be subject to a Select Committee hearing. Even if it is not, you need to understand the workings of Parliament, and be prepared to give an account of yourself if asked.”

The public sector Chair also needs to know that they do not have quite the same autonomy over appointments as in the private sector:

- Selection processes in the public sector are usually led by the relevant Government Department and approved by a Minister. The rules on public appointments must be followed, and a representative from the Office of the Commissioner for Public Appointments may be involved. Unlike in the private sector, the Chair does not usually have the last word on a Chief Executive appointment, but needs to find ways of articulating any concerns that he or she may have about particular candidates;
- Similarly, public sector Chairs may not always have the final word on the appointment of Board members, and may therefore have greater challenges in building a cohesive team;
- If the Chair of a private sector company has serious concerns about Chief Executive or Board member performance, he/she is likely to take soundings with the Senior Independent Director and then decide what action to take. In the public sector, the relevant Government Department will expect to be consulted, and the eventual decision may not always lie in the Chair’s hands;
- In some cases in the public sector, none of the executives are full members of the Board, but are described as “in attendance”. The Chair has to ensure that their views nevertheless get full attention;
- Sometimes the sponsor Department may expect to have a senior official present at Board meetings as an “assessor”, which can impact on the dynamics of Board discussions.

Chair:
“Public sector Boards can be more diverse in the experience that they bring than many private sector Boards, so the dynamics of Board management can be different, and require more investment from the Chair.”

Chair:
“It’s really important to do your due diligence before accepting an appointment, so that you understand what is expected of the Chair of this body, and how your skills match those of the Chief Executive.”

Ten things for the public sector Chair to think about:

- Check that Board members have a shared understanding of governance
- Think about your levers and use them wisely
- Regularly review Board and Chief Executive performance
- Ask others to review your own performance against the key skills for a Chair
- Build a strong relationship with your CEO – or part company
- Understand the politics and the expectations of Ministers
- Identify your stakeholders and how you need to work with them
- Be prepared for the media spotlight
- Consider designating a “Senior Independent Director” to support you
- Think about your other sources of personal support.



PRAESTA INSIGHTS

2010

Seizing the Future

by Peter Shaw (2005-To Date) & Robin Hindle Fisher (2010-2013)

Seizing the future demands an upbeat and assertive approach coupled with realism, humility and the confidence to lead by example. It involves standing back, re-evaluating and being liberated from those previous frames of reference that constrain. The most successful leaders do this while remaining true to clear guiding values.

In Riding the Rapids, published in 2008, we explored the strategies that our clients across the private, public and ‘third’ sectors were using to navigate their ways through the turmoil and uncertainty created by the financial crisis.

In this booklet, we highlight what we are observing in our work with senior executives about what is required to be successful in the future. Whether the future holds continued focus, renewed growth, painful restructuring or complete reappraisal, it needs to be faced up to and addressed successfully. It will almost certainly require adjusting the skills, competencies, attitudes and sometimes emotions that delivered survival or success in the recent past.

Five Key Skills

Many of the characteristics identified as important are leadership fundamentals. However, they require a particular focus at times like these – they are the easiest to lose when under extreme pressure, and they make the greatest difference to effective leadership.

Our conversations with senior leaders suggest that seizing the future successfully requires five key skills;

1. Accept new reality
2. Promote fresh thinking
3. Ensure effective engagement
4. Embrace radical approaches
5. Pace your energies

1. Accept new reality

Economic growth will be re-established at some stage, but looks likely to be modest. Therefore managing and leading organisations in all sectors will be intellectually demanding, physically tough and emotionally stretching over the next few years. Adopting a siege mentality and keeping your head down is unlikely to work.

The impact will vary by sector

- In the private sector, companies are likely to experience only limited top line growth. Achieving acceptable results will require continued improvements in what is offered to customers at the same time as further increases in efficiencies and, probably, sector restructuring and consolidation.
- In the public sector, expectations from both the public and politicians will continue to grow. At the same time the pressure is on to reduce headcount. Leaders have no option but to view reduced resourcing as an opportunity to take a completely fresh look at the ways services are delivered.
- The third sector looks set to face a significant squeeze on revenues, but may well find its role and services are welcomed even more as Government looks for innovative solutions to providing public services. Leaders in this sector will want to address where it is appropriate and feasible for their organisations to take up new roles.

The opportunities are always there: you have to focus on where they are likely to be and get ahead of the competition. Less resource forces difficult questions to be asked. Those who bring insight and perspective and can spot trends and discontinuities will be in a strong position to innovate and may receive a more receptive audience than ever before.

We observe that there are three important initial steps – accepting change, calibrating the gap between the old and the new, and allowing yourself a touch of excitement.

- a) *Accepting that conditions have changed and letting go of the past* is the first step towards making the most of future opportunities. Embracing this new reality might start with recognising that the past has gone and adjusting emotionally to what has been ‘lost’. It means standing back and seeing the journey to date and working out how to deal with obstacles that are now in the way.
- b) *Calibrating the gap between the old and the new* means being ruthlessly honest about where you are now and the degree of challenge. It can involve acknowledging that parts of the organisation are in trouble and that you, as a leader, do not have clarity about the way forward. The new reality is likely to be more demanding and will require leaders and managers, more than ever, to create and drive success for themselves and their own organisations.
- c) *Allowing yourself to feel a touch of excitement by the new landscape.* You may feel daunted or dejected but the new reality can include opportunities, if you adjust the lens you are using to assess it. New vistas you never thought possible will open up. You can feel a new sense of liberation and be a source of energy to those around you.

2. Promote fresh thinking

Promoting freshness of thinking is about being open, discerning, reflective, and liberated, while not devaluing what has gone before. It is accepting that life has moved on and that you take with you your values, experiences and insights into the new landscape.

Freshness of thinking only begins in earnest when you acknowledge what you are feeling about the future. If you are feeling constrained, fresh thinking will not get much of a look in. If you are feeling open minded, fresh ideas can flow in. How willing are you to step inside a bigger landscape and see the world differently?

As you look through the perspectives of different protagonists for fresh thinking, you may find yourself more open to and engaged with new approaches. Freshness of thinking flows from allowing space for reflection, and then moving beyond introspection to wider engagement with different ideas and approaches.

Our clients’ experience is that the key components needed for releasing freshness of thinking include: facing up to the reality of the facts and trends, consciously moving your thinking into another place so you are not harking back to a previous era, recognising and removing inhibitors to your thinking and releasing energy in yourself and others. It involves sometimes following your intuitive thinking and not always being entirely logical!

Promoting freshness of thinking: some ideas

- recollect when you do fresh thinking well,
- identify the intellectual, personal or emotional baggage,
- simplify the data to key facts and trends,
- look at others’ perspectives as a way of freshening your own,
- spend time with those people who stimulate fresh thinking in you,
- support others around you as they renew their ways of thinking,
- consider other people’s motivations and how they can be aligned,
- learn from people from different cultures and age groups,
- follow your intuition and respect the insights it brings, and
- set aside time for reflective thinking.

3. Ensure effective engagement

Effective engagement with others – teams, groups, boards, customers, clients, suppliers, competitors – is often sidelined in importance at times of change and uncertainty. We can so easily convince ourselves that there is not time, or that engagement needs to wait until the picture is clearer. Ironically, effective engagement is even more important at these times.

From the experience of the senior leaders we talk to, engagement that works involves; *relationships based on trust, effective listening, common purpose, shared endeavour; and emotional self-awareness.*

Public Sector: an example

Two Government Departments learned that a Ministerial reshuffle would result in them being merged. This was at first difficult for many people to accept, as they had worked hard to build their own brand with staff and with stakeholders. Many of them now found their jobs at risk. The leadership could not change the new reality, but they could help people to come to terms with it. They called open meetings where they could share what they knew and paint a picture for the future. They promised further open conversations. They explained how staff would be supported with their personal concerns, but then encouraged everyone to think about the contribution they could make to building the new organisation. People found new energy by concentrating on what they could control and influence, rather than dwelling on what had happened.

Creative debate within *relationships based on trust* is critical, so that purposeful dialogue can release new ideas and not be destructive. Interdepartmental battles, individual power struggles and blame cultures will kill trust. At all levels, trust cannot be taken for granted. It needs regular attention and investment of time, energy and emotion.

Building trust requires being genuinely committed to understanding where others are coming from and what success looks like for them. At the same time recognising who you can trust is important. Sometimes there is limited basis for trust and all you can do is listen hard and try to have reasonable conversations.

Our clients tell us that they are constantly reminded about the importance of *effective listening* to those with an interest at any level, while not being sucked into narrow team or departmental perspectives. Success comes through bringing a quality of listening that is “full on”, discerning and discriminating. It is bringing undivided attention and seeing the wider picture at the same time.

Effective partnerships with good quality engagement flow from building shared agendas and a sense of *common purpose* right across the organisation. Some colleagues may tend to build or reinforce barriers in periods of change. Partnerships where feedback can be given and received openly and sensitively are far more likely to survive, thrive and create shared success in times of change.

Senior leaders tell us that committed and flexible groups where individuals are dedicated to both the *shared endeavour* and each other’s success are central to good quality engagement. Teams which

have limited professional and personal engagement will rarely provide the leadership necessary to grasp the future effectively.

The team that knows what each person brings and how and when its members engage effectively together will have a measure of robustness which will enable it to keep its resolve in tough times.

This may involve re-examining the purpose of teams as many teams perceive that they in reality have limited operational or professional shared interests. Recognising the reality and redefining what a team is there to do can be liberating and energising.

Individual leaders tell us about the importance of *emotional self-awareness* and understanding when their personal feelings are getting in the way and inhibiting effective engagement, be they emotions of apprehension, frustration, fear or tiredne

Universities: Third Sector

In anticipation of major changes in their sector, a Vice Chancellor commissioned three separate organisations to imagine future scenarios from a socioeconomic perspective, a customer perspective and a technology perspective.

These scenarios were used to engage new thinking by the executive team and a cross section of staff with the presentations conducted off-site. By engaging these different groups in different ways and challenging them to think radically – a more innovative and flexible strategic plan was created and the level of engagement with ‘unknown’ futures had begun.

Ensuring effective engagement: some ideas

- build connectivity with others – emotionally, as well as intellectually,
- take responsibility for raising the quality of engagement with your peers and with your team,
- encourage honesty and, when required, be challenging in engagement,
- ensure engagement stands the test of time and of disagreements by building and re-establishing trust,
- identify the protagonists who you are least comfortable with and focus on effective engagement,
- practice good quality engagement even when the wider organisation does not seem to support it, and
- recognise that the more you look outside yourself and mentor and encourage others, the greater will be your sense of personal fulfilment.

4. Embrace radical approaches

We observe that the most successful leaders are those who continue to embrace radical approaches. They are open to radical thinking about the way that things are done and will embrace the need to redesign their own leadership approach and personal aspirations.

Our clients talk about the obligation on leaders to stand back uninhibited by previous models or frames of reference. The strength of resolve to redesign well involves being audacious in understanding others’ points of view but not being derailed by fear of upset, uncertainty or ambiguity. Once next steps are clear, the vision behind it needs to be shared with those around you.

Embracing radical change is about taking control of your situation, your energy and your attitude. Many decisions are in the hands of others, but you control decisions about your attitude to the future.

Private Sector: one company’s experience

A company with a long and successful history had to face up to falling sales and a credit drought during the downturn. Management had to take action. A wide ranging strategic review led to site closures and the loss of thousands of jobs.

But the company never lost its focus on innovation, and the workforce valued the continued investment in their skills. Shareholders strongly supported a rights issue and accepted a short term loss of dividends. Suppliers appreciated even closer engagement. Overall the company emerged stronger.

5. Pace your energies

Our consistent observation is that leaders who make the most of opportunities know how to pace and apply their energies skilfully. They are self-aware enough to know that they cannot always be at peak performance and that allocating their energy and time is important.

Drawing from the experience of senior leaders, three steps towards achieving successful pacing of energy include: *build patterns and rhythms that work for you, understand the sources of your resilience, and create ‘shafts of stillness’*.

A starting point might be the *rhythms that maximize the vitality and creativity of both your organisation and you*. Pacing energy involves being acutely conscious of health and well being, and acknowledging the positive and negative aspects of working under pressure. It can mean becoming more ruthless in your use of time and energy. It will mean watching for the danger signals when your spiral of creative energy goes down, and creating situations where the spiral of energy can go up.

Building rhythms that work for you: some ideas

- know the patterns of use of time and energy that work best for you,
- recognise when you are at your most alert to solve difficult problems,
- understand the context when you are at your best at influencing and persuading others,
- watch the consequences of trying to do too many things at once,
- know the best way of not being distracted,
- know the rhythms that help you feel more in control of your own situation and your own creativity,
- be willing and assertive in varying the pace of the day,
- be ruthless in your use of time and energy,
- be conscious when you might go into a downward spiral, and
- recognise the best ways of keeping rhythms that work effectively for you.

Understanding the sources of your resilience, what recharges you and what saps your energy are vital in being able to pace yourself successfully. The successful leader is nurturing and growing the resilience of themselves and their teams.

Guarding resilience involves:

- a) recognising when uncertainty can create a sense of threat and knowing how to handle any darker feelings of doubt, vulnerability or alarm. Some thrive on uncertainty. Others need to be alert to the risk of going into victim mode, and take measures to avoid the self-destructive effect of feeling a victim.
- b) using your emotions as valuable data about people and situations, without being captive to the debilitating consequences of crossness, frustration or antipathy.
- c) training your brain to focus on your priorities by scheduling blocks of time for different types of work and modes of thinking, and trying not to memorise masses of information and instead focussing on identifying key data and trends.
- d) being conscious of how your own brain works and how you can work with your preferences can be very useful in building resilience. It might involve practising noticing your emotions as they arise in order to get better at sensing their presence earlier, or when a strong, difficult emotion is growing refocusing your attention on something else before this emotion takes over or blinds you.
- e) looking after your physical, mental, emotional and spiritual well-being is central to ensuring resilience. Whatever gives you energy, can you do more of it? Whatever lifts your spirits is likely to make you more open-minded to different people and their ideas. Knowing the limits of your resilience is crucial as is taking avoiding action to ensure that your reserves do not become depleted.
- f) being conscious of your own stress levels: when they are helping you be creative and when they are leading to your becoming unhelpfully defensive, and
- g) being conscious of where you want to make a difference and why. It is standing above the fray and allowing yourself to smile.

Creating ‘shafts of stillness’ can be an effective way of pacing your energies and keeping events in perspective. What may seem initially an indulgent luxury can prove to be re-energising and re-vitalising.

Creating ‘shafts of stillness’: some ideas

- create some personal space where you are uncluttered,
- cultivate stillness as an attitude of mind,
- allow yourself to breathe, relax and cherish good moments,
- develop the “mental stillness” muscle and the ability to block out or tolerate external noise,
- be responsible for creating contexts of calmness and stillness for those you work with,
- know how to use stillness to calm you down and move you into the right pace,
- build methods of dealing with habitual noise in open plan, e-mails, texts and chatter,
- accept when noise and interference can be a helpful stimulus,
- know how you can use shafts of stillness as a catalyst for action, and
- allow silence in conversation and do not always rush to fill the space

Seize the future

Taking control of the future as a leader is both hugely exciting and daunting. It involves recognising the uncertainties and harsh realities without being diminished by them. Taking control of the future includes being upbeat and assertive, seeing and taking opportunities. It is recognising that you may well be developing and using different skills and attributes.

Progress will involve accepting the new reality, allowing freshness of thinking, ensuring good quality engagement, embracing radical approaches, both organisationally and personally, and pacing your energies. In this journey, knowing your sources of personal support will be invaluable – be they family, friends, colleagues and a mentor or a coach.

Are you ready to be positive in your approach and attitude? The choice of attitude is yours. Keep the focus on what is most important to you and be willing to take control of the opportunities that will emerge.

Seizing the future: in summary

- Define clearly what difference you want to make,
- Develop and share goals and objectives,
- Take control of your diary and create time for thinking and reflection,
- Take control of your working schedule and pace your energy,
- Choose your own attitude to the new reality and the future,
- Know who is committed to your success, and
- Recognise and celebrate progress.



2011

Living Leadership

Finding equilibrium

by Peter Shaw (2005-To Date)

PRAESTA INSIGHTS

Living leadership is about fully embracing your leadership challenges and opportunities. Leading well is about bringing all your experiences to bear, while not trying too hard and exhausting yourself. When you are living leadership you are drawing on your energy and insights, while leaving the sense of guilt behind. You are able to judge when to be on the balcony and when to be on the dance floor: ie when to be observing and when to be intervening.

Living leadership embraces enjoying leading, adapting your approach to fit the context, being true to your values and drawing on all your insights and experience. It involves being confident in what you bring as a leader while always being open to learn. It means being liberated to make your own choices on the way you lead.

Five Key Axes

At the heart of living leadership well is finding the point of equilibrium on five key axes, namely:

- 1. Leading and Managing
- 2. Short-Term and Long-Term
- 3. The Individual and the Team
- 4. Activity and Reflection
- 5. Being Resolute and Adaptable

1. Leading and Managing

There is a false dichotomy between leadership and management. Living leadership requires doing both well. Key elements are:

- Bring clarity and purpose
- Create liberation, energy and hope
- Grow organisational resilience

Bringing clarity of purpose requires a combination of leadership that inspires and management that delivers. Good leadership ignites a passion to make a difference. Sound management is about well planned programme, project, performance and risk management.It means clear expectations based on underpinning standards, with a significant degree of empowerment.

Without leadership there is no vision and energy. Without management there is limited discipline or structure. Clarity and purpose that is engaging and realistic will inspire a clear passion both to make a difference and to ensure quality management. Creating a clear picture of what an organisation is there for requires both uplifting leadership and effective management.

Liberation, energy and hope flow naturally when simple things are done well and when there is a consistency between values and behaviours. A sense of personal liberation as a leader results from the individual knowing where they stand without guilt or fear of blame. Energy flows when the direction is clear, the sense of mutual encouragement and common purpose is strong and mutual respect is high.

Growing organisational resilience can often be ignored. Building organisational resilience is both about engaging people in new ways and building emotional resonance, alongside clarity about who is accountable for what. Growing organisational

Example: A renewed confidence

The organisation felt fearful of making mistakes and constrained. Its reputation had taken a hammering because of some well publicised errors. A new leader brought both clarity of purpose and a strong sense of both challenge and encouragement. People within the organisation felt able to try new approaches. They felt more confident because of both purposeful leadership and sound programme and performance management arrangements.

resilience is about building the capability to address both the known and the unknown. Evaluating clearly what happened following a minor crisis can lead to important lessons about addressing future, unpredicted events.

Key questions to consider might be:

- Is there more that needs to be done to inspire a clear passion to make a difference?
- Is there enough emphasis on sound management practices covering programmes, projects, performance and risks?
- What more can I do to engender liberation, energy and hope?
- What practical next steps might be taken to build organisational resilience?

Developing organisation resilience

- Ensure as much clarity as possible about the outcomes the organisation is to deliver.
- Be continually focused on customer expectations.
- Create an atmosphere where challenge is welcomed.
- Ensure effective and honest two-way communication throughout the organisation.
- Build an acceptance of the importance of collaboration.
- Demonstrate courage in the way difficult decisions are taken.
- Keep explaining the context within which decisions are made.
- Demonstrate consideration for the professional development of your people.
- Take care of yourself and the signals you give.
- Be consistent in the values and behaviours you want to encourage in the organisation.

2. Short-Term and Long-Term

How can you best have one foot in today and one in tomorrow? Key elements are:

- Recognise the urgent alongside the important
- Build the right foundation
- Ensure that long-term intentions and realities inform short-term decisions

Recognising the urgent alongside the important is about the necessity of keeping the show on the road while delivering the transformation necessary to achieve long-term goals. It involves living with the polarity of doing both the urgent and what is important for the future. It is recognising that fire storms do have to be managed as well as ensuring time is preserved for longer term planning. It is acknowledging that the “day job” cannot be ignored.

Building the right foundation might mean 70% of the effort going into the preparation. It means stimulating debate that brings together quality and quantity with no factors being in the taboo or too difficult categories. It involves preliminary work that examines all the linkages, sees issues from different angles and embraces the perspective of customers and stakeholders. Preparation is about building on solid rock rather than shifting sand, wherever that is possible.

Ensuring that long-term intentions and realities inform short-term decisions is about bringing understanding about the long-term implications of short-term decisions, and about ensuring that long-term desires are not seen as irrelevant or unrelated to necessary short-term decisions.

A tight focus may be important to deliver specific tasks, but a wide field of vision helps ensure that consequences are seen. Bringing clarity about long-term intent can build a greater commitment to the initial steps. A clear understanding of attitudes and the approaches of others is essential to sustain the energy and commitment necessary to deliver multiple outcomes and not be thrown off course.

Example: Pulled in all directions

A leader felt pulled in many directions at the same time. He was rushing from one thing to the next. He knew he needed to be more systematic about allocating his time between the urgent and the important. He used a combination of allocating blocks of time in his diary for longer term issues, being clearer what success looked like both this week and next year, being explicit about when he was available and not available, and recognising what raised or sapped his energy.

Key questions are:

- How might time best be allocated between the urgent and planning for transformation?
- How do you best ensure that the everyday routine work is done well alongside work on longer term transformation.
- Are there times when more resource and energy needs to go into building the foundation?
- How might long-term intentions be made more robust and explicit?
- How can you ensure that your field of vision is not blinkered and is wide enough to encourage the adventurous?

Recognising the urgent alongside the important

- What might get you or your boss sacked if it isn't done?
- What is damaging your reputation which needs to be addressed?
- How best do you ensure enough time and energy to deliver transformation?
- When can the urgent be dealt with by someone other than you?
- Who can hold you to account to ensure that the urgent does not drive out the important?
- How best do you measure progress in dealing with both the important and the urgent?

3. The Individual and the Team

Living leadership means nurturing and growing the energy of both the individual and the team. Both are crucial to success. Key elements are:

- **What is it only I can do as leader?**
- **How might I build a stronger, internal team?**
- **What external partnerships need to be strengthened?**

Most leaders can see where they can make a difference. They want to add value in lots of different ways. They may be better equipped than many of their team to do individual tasks well, but ‘what is the value I can bring’, may be the wrong question. A tighter question is, “What is it only I can do?” Asking that question puts a much tougher filter on how best the leader uses their time and energy.

A successful team will be delivering stronger outputs than they would as individuals. Successful teams will be generating energy in individuals as well as in the team through building on a sense of collective endeavour, with recognition and development of the diverse talents within the team. Teams that are doing well flow from individuals who are playing their part effectively, are true to their own values and are focused on team rather than individual outcomes.

Example: The team as more than the sum of the parts

Each member of the team shared their perspective on what would bring out the best in them. They identified the distinctive contribution each member brought and what they needed in particular from the leader. They worked through what success looked like and how jointly they could increase their prospect of success through the way they supported and stretched each other. They identified how they could keep their deliberations fresh, energised and reflective.

Effective teams are not only internal teams. Building external partnerships well is about creating a wider sense of mutual engagement and commitment from people with a diversity of interests. Living leadership involves creating a sense of team both with those outside and inside an organisation so that there is a shared sense of common endeavour that creates commitment, energises and liberates. Success comes through asking the question regularly about how can building a broader team create synergies and energy that increase the prospect of success.

Key questions can be:

- What is it only I can do in ensuring a particular area of work is led well?
- What more might be done to enable and develop a sense of shared endeavour within a diverse team?
- What external partnerships need to be cultivated and grown?

What is it only I can do as a leader?

- What is brought together at my level?
- Who can I influence more effectively than others?
- What accountabilities do I have that others do not have?
- What is it I can do which affects uniquely the viability of this enterprise?
- If I was not here what would not happen?
- What will members of the team get from me that they would not get from other people?
- What unique insights does my background and experience mean that I bring?

4. Activity and Reflection

Getting the equilibrium right between activity and reflection is about, connecting head and heart, bringing focus and observation, and applying determination and detachment. Key elements are:

- **Seize the moment**
- **Exercise the power of reflection**
- **Timing is all**

Seizing the moment is about accepting new reality and being willing to promote fresh thinking and embrace radical approaches. It is recognising that decisions are needed and not procrastinating. It is being willing to put the foot on the accelerator when there is an opportunity that may not come again. Seizing the moment will often be about taking the initiative to build mutual understanding and a shared will to initiate change.

Exercising the power of reflection is about the importance of standing back and seeing a situation or decision from a number of different angles. It involves encouraging freshness and new thinking, even at busy times. Allowing effective reflection time so that preconceived ideas can be re-examined is fundamental to long-term success.

Good quality reflection will mean that learning is codified, embedded and built on. Astute reflection and observation will mean there is recognition of both the formal and informal processes through which decisions are arrived at. Reflection is not for wimps. Reflection sits alongside courage to ensure that decisions are thought through, consistent with your values and aligned with long-term intent.

Example: A more reflective approach

A leader found himself exhausted and failing to remember the names of key people. He knew he had to stand back in order to move forward effectively. He needed to calm down and create some shafts of stillness. He began to take five minute breaks which helped recharge his energies and put issues back into a wider context. He saw times of being reflective as a strength and not a weakness.

“Timing is all” is knowing when to stand back and when to press the button. The most precious skill of leadership is about judging the moment to take an initiative, make a decision, or change direction. Good timing is about creating defining moments for both teams and wider organisations. Moments of crisis or celebration can be important in crystallizing what in an organisation is there to do. Living leadership is about knowing when to decide, when to “wing it” and when to stand back and reflect.

Key questions might be:

- What needs to happen for you to seize the moment as a leader?
- What practical steps might you take to enhance your powers of reflection?
- In what ways can you remove inhibitions so that your decisions on timing are uncluttered by previous behaviours or expectations?

Enhancing the power of reflection

- What helps you to stand back and stare so you observe well?
- What helps light your fire in terms of what are you passionate about?
- How do you best reflect in short bursts through creating time and space to think or for shafts of stillness?
- In what environment and at what time of day do you best stand back?
- Who are the companions on the way who best enable you to reflect in a purposeful and perceptive way?
- Who do you admire who reflects on situations well and what can you learn from them?
- What small steps can you take to enhance your powers of reflection?

5. Being Resolute and Adaptable

Underpinning the four axes above is the importance of getting the balance right between being resolute and adaptable. Being adaptable is a sign of strength and not weakness. Being overly resolute can mean rushing into a brick wall. Key elements are:

- Be clear what you are passionate about
- Be adaptable and agile
- Emphasise co-creation

Being resolute is about having the passion to make a difference in uncertain times and a doggedness to keep at it. Passion with a purpose starts from clarity of intent, consistent underlying values and the importance of building on the imperative for change.

Resolution and determination flows from confidence in your values and goals, and trust in your own judgement. It involves recognising when you are given authority by others and being willing to take responsibility for your actions. It incorporates a strong sense of self-authorising beliefs and actions, with a sound, internal barometer that keeps you on a reasonable track.

Being adaptable and agile includes recognising when persistent action and determination can risk blinkering your understanding of current reality. It includes understanding your own emotions and how sometimes we can be rigid in our reactions.

Example: Choosing to be adaptable

Being single minded was not getting a leader the conclusions she thought were right. She felt as if she was banging her head on a brick wall. She knew she had to adapt her approach but was not finding the prospect attractive. She forced herself to be more open to the views of others, more willing to vary her approach and less dogmatic about how the objectives should be delivered. She was reassured when progress began to be made.

Being adaptable means both being focused and retaining bandwidth with a breadth of understanding. Agility is about how we get over or around barriers in the way. Constantly searching after new opportunities to deliver well reinforces adaptability and agility, which is crucial to ensuring that resolution does not become tunnel vision.

Putting a strong emphasis on co-creation reinforces adaptability through the involvement of diverse interests and individuals in developing coherent next steps. Building progress around co-creation

and partnership reaffirms the benefits from new ways of working together. Learning fast by working jointly and building buy-in can create both clear resolution and adaptable ways of getting things done.

Key questions to ask can be:

- What am I passionate about and how much of that is rooted in reality and the need for change?
- How much do I trust my own internal barometer to get the balance right between being resolute and adaptable?
- How do I need to be more agile in taking forward living leadership?
- What opportunities are there for more co-creation where I can encourage adaptability while ensuring a strong sense of common purpose?

What might being more adaptable mean?

- Recognising that your experience gives you distinctive insights.
- Believing you have choices, at least about your attitude
- Acknowledging that your perspective is equally valid to that of other people
- Being willing to try new and different approaches
- Not being restricted by previous frameworks or conceptions
- Not allowing yourself to be defined by the expectations of others
- Not limiting your perspective about what success is to previous definitions
- Not allowing yourself to feel guilty if you do not get it right first time

Next Steps

Living leadership to the full can be both painful and exhausting. It means recognising your own limitations, while continuing to stretch the boundaries of your own understanding and preferred approaches. Living leadership is about taking control of the future, being upbeat and assertive, while at the same time recognising the realities and limitations of both yourself and others.

Leading successfully involves keeping an eye on where you are on these five key axes, possibly using the approach set out in the annex. It is about recognising your natural behaviour and being willing to flex it. It includes training yourself to “stretch the slider bar” so you are trying different

positions on the axes. Success will involve judgements about when you lead and when you follow, when you press your point and when you concede to others, and when you lead from the front or steer from behind.

These five axes may well be eternal verities but getting the balance right is fundamental to success for any leader in any sector at any time. Enjoy observing yourself, standing back, experimenting and flexing your approach.

Annex: Reviewing Your Approach

Many leaders we have worked with have found it helpful to stand back and reflect on where they are currently on these five axes.

- What is the split in the time I am currently giving to:
 - leading and managing
 - short-term and long-term
 - the individual and the team
 - activity and reflection
 - being resolute and adaptable
- Do I need to find a new equilibrium and move the “slider bar” on some of these axes?
- What might I experiment with in varying the balance of my use of time and energy?
- Who can I ask to stretch my thinking and give me feedback?

In relation to your team questions to enable them to reflect might be:

- Where are we as a team on these five axes?
- What benefits might flow from assessing whether we have got the balance right?
- What steps might we take as a team and as individuals to reassess the right point of equilibrium on these axes?
- What might we do differently?

Looking again at these five axes can provide a defining moment for an individual or team, when reviewed individually, or with a colleague or a coach, or in workshop. Time spent reflecting on these themes is likely to result in greater clarity about next steps and a renewed energy, however daunting the issues being addressed.



2012

Metro Leaders

A new breed of men in business?

by Jane Stephens (2007-2013) & Robin Hindle Fisher (2010-2013)

Saul Klein, the technology venture capitalist behind a host of successful start ups including Lovefilm, Firefly and Seedcamp, describes himself on Twitter as ‘Husband. Dad. Serial entrepreneur.’ He is a high profile example of a new breed of men in business life who are choosing to behave differently in the workplace and who are happy to express priorities in their lives that are different to their fathers’ and older generations’.

We have seen a growing number of this new breed in our coaching work in recent years. They take having collaborative, relationship based styles of leadership for granted, have different assumptions about the nature of their authority and define their identities through multiple roles in their lives. Their leadership styles reflect their personalities, characteristics and values – for this group being authentic is a given. We have labelled this breed of younger leaders ‘Metro Leaders’. Some are comfortable with being open about being ‘different’ while others find it less easy and encounter some resistance from colleagues who still expect more conventional behaviour from male business leaders.

In order to get a clearer picture of Metro Leaders we interviewed twelve male business leaders over a six month period. Some were coaching clients of Praesta and some were not. All of our respondents were recommended to us by our colleagues or third parties as fitting our description of executives in their late 30s and early 40s who are leading in a more collaborative way, involving a lot of active listening, welcoming of challenge and notably less ‘hierarchical’ in style.

All of the cohort we interviewed have already been highly successful in business. They all operate at board, exco, CEO or managing director level – at, or close to, the top of their organisations. The businesses they work for are in multiple sectors and vary from venture capital backed to publicly quoted. In size, they span a consultancy with around 60 people to major units of multinationals with

staff numbers in the hundreds in multiple locations. Being based on interviews with a selected group, our study is observational and qualitative rather than quantitative in nature, but is, we believe, nevertheless representative of an interesting phenomenon in corporate life.

Products of their time

Identifying what has prompted the emergence of this new style of male leadership is complex. The fact that the current generation of leaders in their late thirties and early forties are the offspring of the baby boomers who were themselves influenced by the 1960s might partly explain why they are less hierarchical than previous generations. However, we believe globalisation and technology are key drivers of the changes in attitude we have observed. Instantaneous access to information has changed the power dynamic between leaders and followers. Knowing more is no longer enough. Followers’ positions have become stronger and they have less respect for hierarchy. This means that command and control styles of leadership are less effective – even if you could command, you certainly could not control the implementation of real time decisions in multiple time zones and languages.

Working regimes have also been transformed by technology. Metro Leaders use technology positively – to bring flexibility to their working days, rather than allowing it make work the master of their time.

The defining characteristics of Metro Leaders

The key attributes of Metro Leaders we have identified are:

- 1. Attitude to authority** – they prefer to establish credibility than use the status of their position
- 2. Collaborative yet decisive** – they delegate and collaborate but expect results
- 3. Access to knowledge and information** – they recognise that access is not limited to the top
- 4. Ideas come from everywhere** – as above, the best ideas are not limited to those at the top
- 5. Comfortable with lack of omnipotence** – they acknowledge that they do not have all the answers
- 6. Comfortable having multiple roles** – they take their multiple roles in life for granted
- 7. Manage competing priorities** – they manage their time to suit their various roles
- 8. Present single identities** – they are the same person at work, at home and down the pub
- 9. Manage the whole person** – they manage staff as people, not employees

‘Getting the right people into the right jobs and motivating them has always been fundamental to business, but complexity has increased due to globalisation and technology – email, Blackberry, more travel mean there are more moving parts...’

President, global publishing company

They also accept that others can do the same – meaning that they are more inclined to judge by results than by compliance with traditional office routines.

Transparency – personal, professional and organisational – is also affecting attitudes. The proliferation of information, particularly via social media, means that reputations are open to wider scrutiny than ever before. It is much more difficult now for people in business to have multiple personas and much easier for failings as a leader or boss to circulate in the public domain.

‘Our personal brands are more visible. Your reputation follows you around. It is tougher to get away with being a big stick monster.’

Managing Director, global technology provider

The characteristics that make Metro Leaders ‘different’

It is important to stress that the characteristics that define Metro Leaders build on traditional leadership traits. All of our interviewees mentioned the importance of setting vision, of competence and mastery of the detail of their businesses, of being exemplars of hard work and of delivering strong results. Metro Leaders know that getting the basics right is as important as ever.

We observed a number of characteristics that we believe define Metro Leaders. The first is their attitude to authority. They are clear that changes in the workplace brought about by the trends mentioned above mean that establishing credibility to lead is preferable to using the authority bestowed upon them by their positions. They therefore place great importance on the quality of the relationships they have and on influencing skills. Demonstrating their own personal commitment, being trustworthy, open, genuine and sincere, are essential elements of their behaviour. These qualities stem from deep rooted attitudes and beliefs – meaning that it is difficult to adopt this style of leadership without truly believing in it. Many commented that the title on your business card brings something, but not enough, and that it can be easily squandered. The interviewee quoted below summarised this particularly eloquently:

‘...short term it (authority) comes from your position in the hierarchy, but that only lasts about ten minutes. From then on it is not about what you know or being the best at what you do anymore, credibility comes from your ability to have insights, to see connections and to influence people...’

Director of Strategy at a UK food retailer

Having a delegating and collaborative yet decisive style of leadership is how Metro Leaders establish their credibility. Like their predecessors, they appreciate the need to hire very smart people. They observe that the greater complexity brought about by globalisation means that hiring smart people they can trust is even more critical than ever. Once in place, colleagues are given authority and ‘space’ to operate with short, open lines of communication. Colleagues’ involvement in decisions reflects the relevance and quality of their input, not their place in the hierarchy. Open and frank debate is critical to how Metro Leaders work. They welcome challenge and some put formal mechanisms in place to ensure that their position in their organisation does not dissuade staff from openly debating and challenging them.

Metro Leaders recognise that access to knowledge and information is no longer confined just to those at the top of organisations. ‘Need to know only’ is anathema. They believe that good ideas come from everywhere. Their style involves high levels of transparency and active listening to others, irrespective of their position, which would look anarchic to a generation of managers used to clear lines of decision making.

‘In the old style of management the senior person made the decisions; in this more modern style, the ideas come from everywhere’.

President, global publishing company

Acknowledging that good ideas can come from everywhere requires humility and being comfortable with lack of omnipotence – things Metro Leaders are entirely at ease with.

‘...I explained that the top team does not have all the answers, that we have blind spots and that there is an opportunity to raise issues and contribute to decision making...’

UK Managing Director, US consumer credit company

Despite their humility and desire to involve more people in ideas generation, Metro Leaders are clear about the need to set direction. They are decision orientated, firm about their expectations of others and understand that they are under at least as much

pressure to deliver business results as their more hierarchical predecessors. Encouraging collaboration and seeking multiple inputs to decisions do not equate to being overly democratic or ‘soft’ on people.

‘I fight against being ‘collegiate’ a little – there needs to be a bit of edge and you need to remember that people are looking to you to make decisions...I am collegiate but then operate as a benevolent dictator once decisions have to be taken’

CEO, European quoted technology business

Metro Leaders are comfortable having multiple roles in their lives. Their roles outside the office are as important as their work. This applies to their roles as husbands and partners, fathers and sons.

This is not to imply that previous generations of business leaders were not good and loving husbands and fathers. Although the extent to which our interviewees are open about it with colleagues varies, they all see being actively engaged with families and/or partners as being integral to their lives and how they want to live them. These are not optional extras, or ‘nice to haves’. One Metro Leader described how ‘the job description for men has changed’ to include a broader range of contributions with less emphasis on merely being the bread winner than previous generations. Another summed this theme up with the following comment:

‘Being more involved in family life is now part of the job description of fathers... I commit maybe 30 to 40 per cent of my time to “the other job”

CEO, e-commerce network company

Once again, technological change is having an important influence. Metro Leaders use technology positively to help juggle their roles. One interviewee recalled how being able to check and send some emails in the morning allowed him the flexibility to attend a meeting at a potential school for his daughter – a meeting he speculated his father’s generation would not have been able to justify in their schedules. They also appreciate that technology benefits others too – so are more

inclined to judge people by results, to be relaxed about working remotely and supportive of part-time and flexible arrangements.

These men are typically clear about how they intend to manage the competing priorities of work and home. They often have targets for what they are trying to achieve such as having breakfast with the family 3 times a week, not travelling for work on a Sunday or cooking dinner a certain number of times a week. They are pragmatic and realistic that given the nature of their business roles they will not always be successful. Nevertheless, as one Metro Leader said ‘if I make 80 percent of the time I am doing ok’. There is an interesting contrast here with many women we coach who worry more about the 20 percent they miss.

Metro Leaders understand that, if misused, technology can allow work to become the master of their time. Several spoke of limiting email time at weekends and while on holiday - not letting contact with the office disturb their families’ routines. One interviewee mentioned that he rarely uses his laptop in front of his children during the week and is too busy coaching his son’s football team at the weekend to be in contact with his business. Several disclosed that they feel their intense involvement in family life helps them keep perspective and remain grounded, and thus contributes to their effectiveness as leaders.

We gained a strong impression from the cohort we interviewed of the importance work and family play in their senses of identity. This was often clear from the responses to our question that effectively asked them to write their interim obituaries – ‘what would you like other people to say about your life to date when you are 60?’

Without exception, the Metro Leaders we interviewed mentioned aspects you would expect from any successful business person - comments such as ‘made a difference’, ‘left businesses in better shape than when I arrived’, ‘made a lot of money for clients’, and ‘made enough money to be comfortable and for people to say I have been ‘successful’’. Many also mentioned, with equal weighting to success, factors concerning their teams – ‘created a band of brothers’, ‘developed his people’ and ‘had fun’.

But the majority of the senior leaders we interviewed also mentioned some aspect of their family lives. A number of interviewees commented that they were not prepared to let their success be achieved at the cost of their relationships with their families. They want to be integral players in family life – not absentee husbands, partners or fathers. Others gave this an even stronger emphasis:

‘Years ago people thought their job was their status, but I would prefer people to see my family unit than to hear about my job’

Co-Founder and Managing Director of an IT consultancy

The significance of our interviewees’ comments is not that they are substantially different to those that older men would have given in answer to the same question. The difference was nuanced yet clear – Metro Leaders feel they have a choice, to be involved in roles outside work in a way that their fathers did not. And, either overtly or covertly, they are exercising that choice. Metro Leaders manage their multiple roles but present single identities. They are consistently a whole person - the same ‘in office’ as ‘out of office’ with no distinction between their business personas and their personal personas. One Metro Leader summed this up as:

‘I went from being a ski bum to being an investment banker and I like to think I haven’t changed...I try to be the same down the pub as I am in the boardroom – maybe a bit more structured, but basically the same person’

CEO, European quoted technology business

The attitudes to their own identities influences how Metro Leaders recruit, lead, manage and retain talent. One interviewee spoke of how he builds personal relationships when hiring new staff, believing that the generation of talent in their 20s and 30s is attracted to an organisation as much by its people and senior leaders as by its corporate reputation. They believe they need to be seen as a person as well as a compelling leader. To do this they must be accessible and interact with people at all levels in the organisation. They appeal to people’s hearts as well as their heads and this involves revealing something of their own hearts too. It also means making an effort to get to know their people and being present and visible in multiple locations.

The same Metro Leader quoted above gave an example of how he manages the whole person. When he realised that a Chinese colleague was responding to his emails at 3 o’clock in the morning Beijing time, he actively discouraged him from this diligence and commitment to the company, explaining that a senior executive who was not sleeping would not be able to perform in the way he wanted. This attention to being a caring boss appealed to the heart of his colleague and generated great results through improved loyalty. Others talked about the importance of responding to key events in peoples’ lives and making sure they take the time they need for important moments in their lives.

‘I am conscious of their (his team’s) whole lives, not just their working lives – I manage the whole person’

President, global publishing company

Senior leaders being true to the whole person rather than being ‘good corporate men’ is not necessarily wholly positive for companies. Whilst Metro Leaders want challenging and successful careers, they are not prepared to compromise the other roles they have to achieve them. A very strong theme of our interviews of Metro Leaders was that they are much less prepared than previous generations of men to be geographically mobile. Many have wives or partners with their own careers of equal importance and consider it unreasonable to move location at important times in their children’s education.

Metro Leaders’ broader attitudes to their employers are similar to their views about location. They expect their jobs to be interesting and challenging and for roles to build their credentials and to support their CVs. They believe they have more choice in how they develop their careers than previous generations. They are no longer expected to pick one company and stay with it, complying as necessary, for their entire career. They believe the development of the knowledge economy and changes in technology mean there is a wider array of opportunities and more mobility. Greater appreciation by employers of cross sector experience and the growth in private equity backed business were also cited as reasons for the current generation of men having much greater choice about their careers than in the past. Metro Leaders take advantage of this choice to find jobs that they are committed to but that fit the needs of their whole person too.

Our work at Praesta with hundreds of senior leaders certainly does not suggest that management styles favouring more collaborative, less hierarchical behaviours are the only show in town. Indeed, the current position is that there are still at least as many Alpha Leaders in the senior echelons of business as there are Metro Leaders. But this more modern breed that we have portrayed here is growing and gaining greater confidence. We speculate that in the next decade there will be more Metro Leaders at the top of organisations and that the corporate world will be the richer for their influence.



2012

The Age of Agility

by Peter Shaw (2005-To Date) & Steve Wigzell (2005-To Date)

PRAESTA INSIGHTS

Agility and why it matters - When we at Praesta reviewed our work recently, we were struck by the way clients were trying to deal with economic and geo-political uncertainty. Rarely in our working lives have macro economic outlooks seemed so hard to predict. Many organisations had used the recession to good effect. They had revisited strategies, taken and enacted tough decisions, re-focused businesses, re-configured top teams and got corporate finances into robust shape, so as to be fit for a new, likely future scenario of steady, low growth in western economies. Yet, to many, making any sort of bold move constituted a wild throw of the dice. The new priority was ensuring a safe passage for their organisations.

When we dug deeper some dynamic activity was in play. Many of our clients were investing in environmental scanning, to pick up weak, early signals of changes relevant to their organisations. They were developing their organisations’ ability to act swiftly and surely in response to opportunities and threats, to react faster than their competitors and to switch resources at short notice. Agility – how to wait, watch, and make fast, decisive moves at the right time - has become a core source of survival and long-term competitive advantage.

Our view is that agility starts with the leader, who shapes the capability of his/her teams and, through them, the wider organisation. We therefore look at agility from a leadership perspective.

Agility: what it is....

For the people and organisations we work with:

- *Agility is the facility to act and react fast and decisively*, to move into and out of situations with sure-footed confidence, when the time is absolutely right so as to open the door to opportunities, secure competitive advantages and avoid potential threats.

- *Agility requires mental alertness* that informs, and is informed by, a high state of suppleness and fitness. It is a state of readiness and of being, albeit one that needs to be rested to conserve energy and strength for when they are most needed.
- *Agility’s use is situational*, so it is important to develop it for when you need it. Once the time has come, if you and your organisation do not possess agility, it is too late to start working on it.

When a leading building society heard that another mortgage and savings book was available, it moved fast. By deploying the appraisal and decision making capability it had achieved through making two other acquisitions, it rapidly secured attractively priced funding that reduced its requirement to access more expensive and volatile wholesale markets.

...and isn’t

Agility is not:

- *Restless, aimless action.* Having agility and using it are different things. Agility is best used selectively and purposefully.
- *Purposeful action at the wrong time.* Things can go badly wrong if even a worthwhile move happens on the wrong occasion or at the wrong time.
- *Heavy change management programmes.* Agility is about travelling light in the right general direction with strategic goals in mind.
- *An athlete permanently condemned to sitting on the sub’s’ bench.* If agility is never properly exercised, then it will degrade over time.

Becoming an agile leader

A lot of Praesta’s work is with individual leaders. We have therefore explored how they can promote and embody agility themselves. Eight mutually reinforcing elements stand out in relation to how an agile leader relates to others and manages him/herself.

With regard to relating to others:

- *Sustain momentum.* The emphasis needs to be on finding reasons to say “yes” rather than “no”. If you are behaving like a rabbit in the headlights, going round in circles, parking things or putting them off, then your organisation will drift. It is easier to exercise agility if there is some momentum that can be deployed to seize an opportunity, take avoiding action or find another way of achieving your own or your organisation’s goals.
- *Have adult conversations.* Organisational confidence is fragile and fickle. Easy clichés and glib assurances do not impress people who read newspapers and are plugged into informed social networks. Talking meaningfully to your own people keeps you and them in the loop of what is actually happening. They will take comfort from knowing you and others are “on watch”. You will make better decisions because of what they tell you. And when you take action, people will be prepared for it.
- *Encourage initiative.* If you have all the answers, set all the goals and have a marked preference for how things should be done, then others will tend to do what is safe: keep their heads down, walk the treadmill and do what they’re told. Expressing your displeasure with

these ponderous behaviours will make them worse. Enabling others, by encouraging their contributions and supporting their efforts, is more likely to succeed.

- *Frame the context.* The way you frame the context in which other people work will affect the nature of their thinking and activity. Agility is well served by establishing a combination of clear goals and a framework for decision making that gives people a lot of room to use their own initiative as to how things are done.

With regard to managing yourself:

- *Accept the new reality.* When things have changed, recognise a new reality and accept it. Making commitments and taking action may require you to set aside things to which you were previously committed. Put your emotions to one side, manage your anxiety, let go and move on.

When faced with major changes

in student funding senior leaders in a university took time out to work through the challenges involved. They needed to take tough decisions if they were to become agile and responsive to shifts in students’ requirements. It meant overcoming barriers to change, turning uncertainty into new opportunities and motivating their staff to get behind the new agenda and make it happen.

- *Think radically and recognise you have choices.* When many factors are outside your area of influence, it is easy to feel boxed in, to rehearse and perfect circular arguments and concur with the collective wisdom of group-think. In our experience, clients suffering in such ways are usually constrained by their own limiting beliefs. When they re-frame their situations and challenges, new insights and choices emerge. Most times, there is a way.
- *Take care of yourself and ensure other people do the same.* If you and those around you are working 110%, you are not well placed to notice what is going on and make sense of it. Nor do you have spare capacity that can be rapidly deployed when needed. So arrange things such that people cover for each other and do whatever rests and energises you on a regular basis.

A newly appointed leader who took over a national organisation knew he had to both sustain momentum and change the leadership team. He recognised he had to exercise choices about both priorities and people. He had a sequence of frank conversations that prompted a step change in the performance of some people and the departure of others. He kept his physical agility by doing long walks, his mental agility by talking with a trusted mentor and his emotional agility by listening to the small voice within.

- *Listen to the small voice within.* The subconscious has a habit of making connections that we find hard to articulate. That does not mean that the messages it sends us are wrong, but they are easy to dismiss. Instinct is a bedfellow of agility, so take time out to reflect and, when your inner voice speaks, give it some air time: it may be saying something you should hear!

Becoming an agile team

We also work with a lot of top teams. For them, agility is promoted by:

- *Doing what only it can do.* A top team – any team – needs to be clear about the place it should occupy in the organisation’s value chain. What must the team’s differentiated contribution be to help the organisation to deliver its strategic outcomes? Many top teams fail to take a hard look at their core purpose, take on too much, lose focus, become a choke on enterprise and a block on progress. Agility dies as a consequence.

When the Underwriting Board

of a global insurance business was asked what its prime accountability was, its initial answer was “this year’s underwriting result”. When it revisited the first answer, it concluded that the current year’s underwriting results were actually the responsibility of its regional businesses and that its own responsibility was to create sustainable, long-term competitive advantage through its professional leadership of the group’s underwriting systems, policies, processes and people. That resulted in it working on a very different agenda and reducing the cause of tensions between itself and the regional underwriting teams.

- Integrating with the informal organisation. Most of the effective communication within organisations is carried out informally. If top team members have influential positions in the informal social networks that operate across the organisation’s key functions and geographies, the team as a whole can get the intelligence it needs, disseminate information, test decisions, marshal opinion and mobilise resources.
- Avoid isolation. It is easy for a top team to create its own bubble. Common manifestations are special office and communications facilities; and frequent, regular meetings that suck in more and more decisions. Whilst it is important that a top team functions efficiently as a discrete unit, it can also become distanced from the rest of the organisation and concentrate power in ways that were not intended. The trick is to get the best of both.
- Working in small, networked teams. By dint of their size and business-as-usual agendas, most executive committees are unsuited to doing high quality work fast. Small, collaborative, well-networked executive teams use informal processes more than formal ones, and work iteratively to facilitate rapid information exchange, thereby enabling fast decision making.

The top team of a consumer telecoms

business looked at how it could best meet its ambitious goals. It concluded that it had to operate with the agility of a start-up. Its members promptly moved to a shared space to facilitate the kind of iterative communication, fast decision making and collaborative working that was required.

Becoming an agile organisation

What might leaders and top teams attend to in order to achieve organisational agility? At a practical level, organisational agility depends critically on the following points:

- *Comprehending the environment.* Most of our clients’ organisations are investing more effort in the complementary activities of scanning the environment and making sense of what they are finding out, in order to inform decision making in a timely way. Typically this involves:

- > Widening and deepening the information sources they trawl. This usually involves making new and different connections to comprehend soft data, such as opinions and informed speculation, as well as factual data.
- > Pooling information with colleagues more frequently, formally and informally, so that more brainpower and experience are applied to a wider set of data.
- > Making sense of disparate sets of data by developing, sharing and testing insights and hypotheses, thereby building a shared perspective whilst avoiding group-think.
- > Regularly applying the resulting learning to the organisation’s strategies and plans and then making decisions appropriately.

An incoming CEO called for the abandonment of his company’s digital strategy when he heard how much it was costing. The head of the digital business pushed back: “My business now generates 21% of our revenue for 2% of its cost using 0.2% of its people. You can cut off the investment if you like but I wouldn’t do that.” The CEO reversed his decision because he realised the world had changed. The investment continues as does progress: the digital business put on another million customers last year.

- *Achieving and maintaining organisational resilience.* A resilient organisation can withstand the buffeting and traumas an uncertain environment inflicts upon it. It has a dynamic equilibrium that enables it to take bold, decisive action without being destabilised as a consequence.
 - > Resilience is usually achieved by a combination of financial robustness, market power, leadership continuity and the continued confidence of key stakeholders such as customers, employees, regulators, investors, lenders, politicians and the media.
 - > Resilience is also promoted by organisations recognising the choices available to them about which geographies, products, services, investments and initiatives they can back. Agility facilitates timely switching of resources between them, thereby increasing the probability of meeting goals and mitigating risk.

When an international company faced unexpected financial problems in one area of its business this provided a stimulus to address wider issues across the Group. Ways of addressing issues had become fossilised. Agility meant moving away from tired routines and stimulating fresh ways of tackling a rapidly changing market.

- Engaging stakeholders. Ongoing engagement of internal and external stakeholders, whose support is likely to be needed to get buy-in to decisions and implement them, helps establish the conditions for agility.
 - > Better decisions can be made faster by well informed people and teams, who understand the bigger picture. They can be better tested and built upon by key stakeholders who are already up-to-speed; and executed better and faster by engaged, well informed managers and collaborators.
 - > The challenge is to win hearts as well as minds, to generate the energy, focus and, thereby, the momentum needed to act fast: to develop the goodwill that helps avoid blame and witch hunts when changes of course are required and mistakes are made – i.e. at the very time that constructive energy and positive action are needed most. Corrective action needs agility too!

After two years of stabilising and improving a substantial international, family owned business, the CEO decided it was at a strategic cross roads. He believed the business was ready for significant investment that would spur further growth, but this money had to come from the family forgoing dividends, taking on debt and/or ceding 100% ownership. He suggested there should be a family conference at which the options for the business and their funding implications were presented and discussed in depth. He insisted the family should not make a hasty decision, but take advice and time. They were very impressed with the input and agreed a process and timetable for coming to a clear, agreed way forward.

- *Developing organisational capability.* The key to an organisation’s agility resides in the people who lead and manage it. Their attitudes, energy and skills affect the culture and infect the people around them. Our insight suggests that three complementary factors should receive attention so as to encourage initiative and collaboration and nip dysfunctional behaviours in the bud. These are:
 - > Knowing, developing and deploying talented people who find it natural to create a can-do culture that encourages the use of initiative within a clearly communicated strategic framework. This involves appointing and promoting people who exhibit the right kinds of attitude - including telling it how they see it - and weeding out derailers and blockers.
 - > Widespread use of a coherent, practical leadership approach that equips senior managers to engage hearts as well as heads in the pursuit of the corporate agenda, thereby getting the best out of people. This involves adopting a model that suits the organisation, training people in it and helping them to use it properly day-to-day.
 - > A performance management regime that recognises team outcomes as well as individual contributions. Even today, many organisations whose goals can only be achieved by the whole becoming greater than the sum of its parts, still run performance management systems that in reality only comprehend individuals, not teams.

A Final Thought

All individuals, teams and organisations deserve to embed the competences and attitudes that produce confident, sure footed agility when needed. Agility for an individual, team or organisation requires a thoughtful, persistent and adaptable approach. Individuals need to keep reminding themselves how they keep agile so they can ‘float like a butterfly and sting like a bee’. Similarly any organisation should be mindful of how it is going to retain that capability. It will be tough and rewarding at the same time. So keep making the right inputs and, with an element of good fortune, you will be pleased with the outcomes.



PRAESTA INSIGHTS

2013

Continuity and Succession

How not to lose the baby with
the bath water

by *Steve Wigzell* (2005-To Date)

The purpose of this Insight document is to prompt thinking and action that de-risks chief executive succession. It is informed by our knowledge of what happens before and after a change of guard at the top.

It is aimed at those who have a big stake in how succession impacts the organisations for which they have a duty of care. These include board Chairs; non-executive directors, especially members of Nominations Committees; Chief Executives who are interested in the fate of the organisation that they will, one day, leave behind; members of executive teams whose working lives will be affected by who their next boss might be and how he/she will impact the success and nature of the business they work for; and the HR professionals who support all of these constituencies.

Ne'er his like again?

“When great trees fall, rocks on distant hills shudder, lions hunker down in tall grasses, and even elephants lumber after safety.”

Maya Angelou, *When Great Trees Fall*

It takes years – often decades - to implement a successful strategy; not least because it takes time to build the kind of distinct, coherent culture that delivers sustainable competitive advantage. So the current regime can be tempted - and encouraged - to stay too long as they, and those around them, fear a future without them.

Yet everyone moves on eventually. Appointing the wrong chief executive is often the crack that becomes a fatal fault line in a patiently executed strategy. New people want to make a mark and are usually expected to do so. That's fine when what's in place isn't working as well as it should as it usually takes a clear head, a new set of skills and different

attitudes to make the fundamental changes that lead to a sustainable, quantum increase in performance. It can be folly when what is in place is working just fine.

‘...I spent a huge amount of time researching this issue of CEO succession. In companies that are doing well and with a culture that is successful, you tend to find that the internal candidate is much more successful than the external candidate. It is where the culture is broken and the performance is in tatters that it needs a change in direction from the outside.’

Gareth Davies, Chairman, William Hill
Quoted in *The Daily Telegraph*, July 5th 2013

How, then, do organisations that operate successful strategies, that know what they're doing, avoid the chief executive becoming “irreplaceable”? And when they do, how do they avoid risking their hard-won success when he/she retires? In short, how do boards and chief executives assure continuity of strategy and execution through succession?

Be prepared

“But we're talking kings and successions, Even you can't be caught unawares”

Tim Rice/Elton John, *Be Prepared*

The day a new chief executive assumes the role, one thing is certain: someone, some day, will succeed him. It follows there should always be credible potential successors to the chief executive, even if none of them is the perfect article. After all, someone has to do the job!

A well-run enterprise will always have someone who can step into the breach, with support, if an emergency arises. And it is a poorly run enterprise that cannot develop credible, attractive internal succession candidates, given a few years.

That said, the universal rule about succession plans is they usually don't happen as described. Sometimes the chief executive moves on earlier than expected. Sometimes the planned successor is lured somewhere else. The most robust foundation for both planned and emergency succession, therefore, is to ensure the business is not critically dependent on one individual. It should have sufficient direction and momentum to carry on in the chief executive's absence. This permanent state of practical preparedness is enabled by having:

- A stable, effective executive team in place, that leads and runs the business. The chief executive must create a constructive environment in which people can blossom individually and work together effectively. This requires him/her to operate first and foremost as a team builder, rather than an autocratic hero or virtuoso performer.
- An engaged board, whose Chair and non-executive directors will mould around a new chief executive, interim or otherwise, to mitigate his inexperience and build his confidence if required. Whatever the Chairman and board did before, they will have to do things differently whilst a new chief executive gets his/her feet under the table.
- A practical contingency plan. Who would chair the executive committee pro tem? Who, if anyone, could become interim chief executive? Will the Chair fill the gap? Is there a non-executive director who could help out? If your board's answers to these questions are unconvincing, then it has got some more work to do!

Be careful what you wish for

BADGER: *Toad Hall is now Weasel Hall, I'm afraid.*

TOAD: *They can't do this to me. They just can't do it. Toad Hall belongs to a long line of Toads, and I intend to have it back.*

Kenneth Grahame and Alan Bennett,
The Wind in the Willows, Act 2, Scene 3

Most organisations have strategies that are fit for purpose, that have been guided by and are supported by their boards. They are executed according to plans that are regularly refreshed and renewed, that their boards have also supported. There is a commonly-used name for this happy, yet hard to achieve, condition: “business as usual”, “BAU”.

It is therefore stunning how often succession triggers wholesale reform and revolution, rather than nurtures continuous improvement and evolution. Whilst few external appointments to chief executive are made without good reasons, they are always attended by significant risks to BAU.

A well run mutual business with a strong tradition and culture had groomed a successor to its long-serving chief executive. Two non-executive directors hi-jacked the succession process, turning it from a validation exercise involving benchmarking into a full-blown market search. The internal candidate did not make the short list of two. The incumbent chief executive argued successfully against the preferred external candidate, who was obliged by the regulator to stand down from his own job shortly afterwards. The default candidate, who had no history in the sector or in running mutuals, was appointed: an outcome with a very different risk profile to what the company intended.

Why does this happen? Sometimes, nominations committees are impressed by candidates who shine brighter than those close at hand, with whom they have dealt for some years; familiarity can breed some form of contempt. Sometimes it is because a cadre of non-executives, whose ambitions for the organisation have been frustrated by the

cogent “steady as she goes” arguments of a strong executive, scent the chance for getting their way through appointing a new broom who will sweep clean. Sometimes the board just underestimates the capability of people inside the business.

Succession as a team game

Revolution is no solution we ought to realise (Now!) Now is the time to set things right

Jimmy James and the Vagabonds

Imagine the top team sat around its table in five years time. How many current members will not be sat there then? Who will be there, who currently is not? And, of those new members, how many are in the organisation already? Who might be chairing the meeting? Who might exercise influence?

Stabilising the top team de-risks the transition from one chief executive to another. So:

- Take great care with appointments to the top team. Aim for the sweet spot, defined by “someone we respect, someone we like, someone who brings things we value, someone others can work with.”

The board’s nominations committee usually considers and approves appointments to the executive top team. Directors must get to know executives who are two or three years away from joining it. Attempts to appoint people simply because they are high achievers and good at managing upwards should be resisted: these are necessary but insufficient conditions. Directors should also take an active interest in how these executives walk and talk the organisation’s espoused values and thereby reinforce its culture; and so avoid putting a rotten apple into the team’s barrel.

“The top leader....could more or less choose to stay in power until he died, appoint anyone he favoured to any powerful position, and depose anyone who he disliked or deemed incompetent.”

- European Union Institute of Strategic Studies: *China’s leadership succession: new faces and new rules of the game*

- Insist the top team manages its own refreshment and renewal.

Assuring continuity by building resilience in the top team isn’t “job and finish”: the team is a living entity. Its members deserve to devote care and attention to picking, mentoring and preparing prospective new members; and then to welcoming and involving them properly when appointed, encouraging them to have their own voice whilst also putting their shoulders behind the team’s shared enterprise; and ensuring they are no-one’s “yes men”.

- Don’t rock the executive boat needlessly.

It takes time and care, by all involved parties, to create the conditions whereby an appointment to the top team is viewed by others as natural and deserved. In the meantime, avoid beauty contests and creating false gods: they both encourage dysfunctional behavior.

As a lot of his/her time will be spent on the corporate agenda, an executive who steps up to the top team will need to change how he runs his own direct reports. It follows that the continuity agenda has to comprehend and address the capability of executives two and three levels down, not just the top tier. This knock-on is best anticipated and planned for.

As a result, the whole process of developing a new member of the top team is best started at least a year or two before promotions to it happens.

The law of unintended consequences, often cited but rarely defined, is that actions of people—and especially of government—always have effects that are unanticipated or unintended.

Rob Norton, *The Library of Economics and Liberty*

Even when a stable, well-functioning top team is in place, the succession agenda is often disruptive. It fires personal ambition in those who think they are in with a chance, or who might benefit from the change in guard.

It usually prompts team members to consider how their own fates will fare when someone else – perhaps a close colleague - is installed in the chief executive’s role. All this has the capacity to immobilise and destabilise the business without really trying.

Planned succession at a savings and loans business went badly awry when the board sent mixed messages to some senior executives shortly before the chief executive’s long-telegraphed retirement was announced. As a consequence, all but one member of the top team formally expressed interest in the job. Although there was a preferred internal candidate, none of the executives had been well prepared to step up to the job of leading his/her peers. As the succession process played out, several executives were disappointed, in some cases angry, as they failed to make even the short list for reasons that seemed at odds with the feedback they had received in the past. Others travelled the same route when it became clear that the board preferred – and had, perhaps, always sought - an external candidate. Succession could and should have been conducted a lot better.

Now what do I do?

If I knew then what I know now, I’d be different, I would slow down I would not be running around, if I knew then what I know now

Lyfe Jennings

Many clients who have stepped into the chief executive role admit privately to experiencing mini-crises of anxiety, panic and self-doubt. How did I get here? Am I good enough? Will I be found out?

Often they don’t get much help or constructive, timely feedback. They have to navigate using their own magnetic north. For people who find themselves in this position, we have found two things are especially helpful:

- Timely self-assessment. A balanced score-card informs a chief executive as to what to focus his/her energies on, enables him/her to check out how things are progressing and can inform an open discussion with the Chairman where appropriate. We have evolved a check-list for this purpose, that can be found at www.praesta.co.uk/page/What-We-Do/Chief-Executive-Resources
- A personal support team provides a safe space in which the chief executive can share inner thoughts, conundrums and challenges in absolute confidence. The team is a virtual one. Its members may not even know of the others’

existence and are usually drawn from different parts of the chief executive’s life – family, old friends, past colleagues, professional advisors and so on. They not only respond to the chief executive, they’re also close enough to raise points of interest and concern that help him keep his feet on the ground, for example, you’re driving yourself too hard, you are getting a bit carried away, you’re neglecting your family.

Two tips for...

If you don’t want to throw your business continuity “baby” out with the chief executive succession “bathwater”, then here are our some tips for the key players involved. We make no apologies for the motherhood and apple pie.

Chairmen

- Get close to three or four people inside the organisation who could become chief executive one day. Find out how they tick.
- Work hard with the CEO to ensure possible successors get the experiences and guidance they need to become impressive succession candidates.

Nominations Committees

- Make sure that people promoted to the top team operate in ways that reinforce the organisation’s espoused culture.
- Ensure detailed knowledge of internal succession candidates doesn’t put them at a disadvantage to external candidates about whom very little is known.

Chief Executives

- Make top team effectiveness your personal priority. No-one else can!
- Don’t keep a dysfunctional executive on the top team, however effective he/she may be.

Top team members

- Always put the health of the business ahead of your personal ambition.
- Build constructive relationships with your peer group colleagues. Be as willing to help them as you are for them to help you.

HR professionals

- Encourage the CEO to invest in his direct reports and to treat team effectiveness as a priority.
- Always arrange for someone to speak to a range of people who have worked with and for an external succession candidate before he/she is offered the job.



2014

Beyond 2020

Things will be different

by Steve Wigzell (2005-To Date)

Photo: NASA

PRAESTA INSIGHTS

“There is tide in the affairs of men which, taken at the flood, leads on to fortune; omitted, all the voyage of their life is bound in shallows and in miseries. On such a full sea we are now afloat; and we must take the current when it serves, or lose our ventures.”

(Julius Caesar, Act IV, Scene III)

How should organisations reposition themselves for 2020 and beyond? What should leaders be doing now to prepare for that? Big questions. Our view is that today's answers are very different to yesterday's. A sea change is in motion. Here, we pull together some strategic strands towards a focus on what you and your organisation could and, perhaps, should do to get in shape for the long term. The bare bones that emerge are:

- To play their proper part in our changing world, enterprises must be socially useful as well as socially responsible. They must help people lead better lives.
- Doing so makes good business sense. Not doing so increasingly incurs reputational risk.
- Most enterprises will need to re-think “what we're really here to do”. Some form of cultural transformation will then be needed to make it happen.
- Authentic leaders, who can identify with a high moral purpose that guides their own conduct and decision-making, are more likely to succeed in creating socially useful enterprises than those who cannot.
- Leadership of that kind requires a combination of deep self-awareness and the exercise of skilful management practice over a long period.
- None of this is easy, but all of it can be done.

The World, Our Nation and You

Sixty years ago the world's population was 2.6 billion. It is now 7.0 billion. Only 10 years ago, global socio-economic power and influence rested firmly with North America and Europe, now it does not. An old order is yielding to another. Our world is more dynamic and less sustainable than ever before. Few, if any, of us is immune to, or isolated from, the impact of these mega-trends.

Some continents and nations are winners, others are not. Britain is one of several countries that finds itself economically challenged by low/no growth, fierce international competition for raw materials, goods and services, the uncompetitive nature of much of its national infrastructure and unsustainable levels of national borrowing. It is socially challenged by the growing unaffordability of our welfare and health systems, lack of jobs, an ageing population and the creation of a relatively uneducated, poor and unemployed underclass. For at least the next decade, may be a lot longer, we are probably going to be poorer economically.

No-one we speak to wants this situation to pertain. Nearly everyone wants things to be better. Few, if any, believe government will do it all for us. Rather, as leaders, we have our own part to play, even if we're hazy about what that is. We recognise that most of the choices we face are dilemmas, that none of the options is wholly attractive or easily achieved.

If creating wealth and using it wisely is part of the solution, then mobilising our collective talents and resources to help create greater, sustainable

prosperity seems one obvious strategy we should implement. The question is: what kind of commercial, social and public enterprises will make a lasting difference to our prosperity; and how can we mobilise to build them?

2020 Enterprises

Ideally, the kind of enterprises we help build and work for will fundamentally improve our socio-economic condition by generating sustainable prosperity.

Successful enterprises are already supporting people in their quest for better lives. They are moving from value chains to value cycles, that achieve prosperity and growth by enabling improvements in the welfare and capability of their customers and of the environments they live and work in.

A regionally-focused building society believes passionately that its members' interests are supported by it playing an active role in promoting the prosperity and well-being of the community it serves. Social housing, that enables lower paid people to live close to their work, is one of that community's most demonstrable needs. The society has joined with local groups and government to build several hundred affordable homes on a derelict, urban site. That commitment will enrich the community it serves and reinforce the relevance of its brand. It is, very literally, good business.

Enterprises like this one are working authentically from a guiding philosophy that informs activity and stimulates creativity. They are seeking to make a difference by playing proactive, leadership roles in the societies and communities in which they operate.

In their 2012 “Top 25 corporate reputations” survey of 40,000 consumers in China, Brazil, Germany, Japan, USA and Russia, Burson-Marsteller et al concluded that: “In short, good corporate citizenship really is good business....in an increasingly transparent, world, isolated programs and insufficient, insincere commitment will undermine, not build, corporate reputation.....Put simply, a brand is what a brand does”

If that's true of international consumer markets, then there is also plenty of evidence that talented people are attracted to working for organisations that demonstrate an innovative approach to good corporate citizenship, even if the organisations themselves are not so good at communicating what they are about.

The information and social networking revolution, catalysed and supported by mobile, web-in-hand technology, ensures that even small pieces of news that can affect an organisation's reputation spread quickly, in ways that are not susceptible to traditional management techniques.

Consequently, the best approach to earning a reputation as a great organisation, that people want to deal with and work for, seems to be a combination of:

- Doing the right things well, day after day, week after week, year after year; and
- Operating with sure-footed agility when the opportunity or need arises.

This consistent, sure touch needs the kind of authentic leadership that can only be sustained by embedding a culture that connects the organisation's head and heart to its moral compass in such a way that “doing the right thing” is sine qua non.

2020 Leadership

If the key components of leadership are to be mindful, give hope and show compassion, in the context of emerging 21st century corporate citizenship it seems to us that:

- Mindfulness has, at its core, a well-informed awareness of the impact our organisations and ways of doing business have, not just on those who interact directly with them but also on the wider world.
- Giving hope is not only about showing how our organisation can deliver benefits to its direct stakeholders but also about engaging constructively with other parties to help shape and deliver desirable, sustainable outcomes that benefit the societies and communities to which it belongs.
- Showing compassion is more than about giving something back. It stems from a fundamental understanding that our organisation – any organisation - has a duty to care for the wider socio-economic systems of which it is a part. It must be socially useful and seek to do as much as it can rather than as little as it can get away with. It belongs, cares and therefore acts accordingly.

2020 Leaders

A generation of leaders is emerging that embraces these challenges very differently to those who went before them. They are finding ways of operating in a 24/7 world of multiple time zones characterised by contending professional, social and personal priorities, which can place unsustainable demands on individuals that become stressful when they conflict with personal values.

These leaders have at their core an attitude to life that resists, more than previous generations, work taking over everything else. Yet they are highly effective. They are accomplished users of modern technology that they exploit to organise their lives. They tend to work in organisations whose can-do cultures support and facilitate flexible working arrangements: they, in their turn, sustain them. They travel easily between different cultures and geographies and see things from an international perspective. Although leaders like this are still in a minority, their example is indicative of a growing cadre. Generation Y is coming of age.

We Do This Already...Don't We?

Does mobilising enterprise in this strategic way require organisations – private and public, yours and mine – to re-think their core purpose, goals, operating principles and business practices? Does it require their leaders to re-define what they are there to do? The short answer, for most of them, is “yes”, at least in part. For example:

- To become a good 21st century corporate citizen requires many organisations to re-interpret what citizenship really means and how that will be tested in courts of public opinion. Increasingly it is about embodying the spirit of what society is seeking rather than complying with the letter of the law, as recent debates about the UK Corporation Tax paid by well known companies such as Amazon, Google and Starbucks illustrate.
- This model of citizenship informs not only the roles and goals of corporate leaders but also the sort of people they should be. A wide range of stakeholders is increasingly influencing who is fit to lead major organisations, such as Barclays, as they assert new corporate values.
- There is then the challenge of how to retain a strong focus on the outcomes you most want for your organisation and yourself such that a series of tactical decisions, each sensible in its own right, does not lead it, or you, to a very different place than the one you wanted to get to. Who wants to end up beached, wondering, as so many people do: “How did that happen?”

Mobilising Enterprise

Mobilising to build enterprises on the scale required to change our fundamental socio-economic condition needs sustained leadership that is, by definition, a team game because:

- The impact of our collective leadership must be to engage, motivate, and catalyse a generation (or two) to act in the service of creating a better future. After all, if we carry on doing what we are doing, we will carry on getting what we are getting. So, it follows that building sustainable enterprises will require us, collectively, to change what we do and the way we do it.
- The required outcomes cannot be delivered by individuals doing their own jobs well. They require collaboration between the public and private sectors; between suppliers, producers and customers; between those who have the ability to make things happen and those who have the power to stop them; between those whose collective skills, experience, knowledge, power and influence are required to get the results we want for our country, our society, our communities, our neighbours, our children and ourselves.

Many agencies subordinated their right of independent action to jointly deliver an outstanding experience for those who visited and participated in the 2012 Olympics and Paralympics. Westminster Council's CEO was one of many who were involved in years of planning and delivery. In his view, the result could not have been achieved without a clear commission for the team that was put in place; and sustained, effective team work to make it happen. On the few occasions when someone protected or promoted their own narrow interest rather than the overall one, the behaviour was dealt with quickly and effectively.

- Achieving the required outcomes will take a long time. People will run their own laps and then pass the baton to others. One generation will take over from another. This isn't “job and finish” – it is a way of being.
- Building sustainable enterprises isn't just for business men and women. Public servants and regulators must also participate in and help expedite the process for it to succeed – creating wealth and using it wisely is at the heart of public service too.

Each of us has to ask him/herself: should my organisation be part of such an agenda? Should I be part of it myself? Do I want to be? And, if your answers are affirmative, then how can you engage others in shaping that agenda and making it happen?

The MD of a credit card business is determined that it, and the sector of which it is a part, should help its customers build better lives. He has taken a sustained personal interest in mobilising his business to think and behave differently, such that it now holds itself responsible for helping sub-prime credit card customers restore their credit rating and thereby qualify for lower interest rates. This has involved taking some personal risks, including advocating, and winning support for, his approach with the foreign parent.

What Can I Do?

One of the principles of solution-focused coaching is that the client comes up with things he/she might do to help mobilise his/her own enterprise and others. As coaches, our role is to facilitate clients in that process. So what follows is intended to stimulate your thinking and action, rather than provide a blueprint or checklist.

- What is your mission in life? What will matter most to you when, in your healthy old age, you look back at who you have been, what you've done and whose lives you have touched? What regrets might you have, if any? How might all this inform your next step?
- Reflect on who you really are. How well do you connect your head, your heart and your moral compass? Is the version of “you” whom you most like and respect the one who speaks and acts most of the time you're at work? If not, how can you bring the “best” you more fully into your job?
- Find a source of inspiration that lifts your spirits and raises your sights. Catch the mood and see where it takes you. Let your imagination take flight.
- If there is one thing you could do to make a difference, what would it be and for whom? How can you use your talents, resources and positions of influence and power to do that?
- How can your colleagues, friends, neighbours and family help you become the best you can be? How can you help them to do the same?

What Can Our Organisation Do?

- How good a corporate citizen is your organisation? How well does it fulfil its duty of care to the communities and societies of which it is a part?
- How does your organisation help support people in their quest for a better life through its day-to-day business? Can and should it do more?
- What is your organisation's guiding philosophy, implicit or explicit? Does it inspire others and help give true meaning to what they do in its name? Is it fit for future purpose or past its “best by” date? What would be more compelling and motivational?
- Is your organisation doing enough to help create the sustainable prosperity that will enrich future generations? What else could it do?
- How does your organisation use its resources, power and influence to help mobilise enterprise and enable others to do so? In what respects is it, or can it become, a role model for others?

Questions Are Easy...

...it is the answers that are difficult. Yet the tide of change that is already flowing strongly is likely to take all with it. For most organisations, the people that work for them and those who would like to, the choice is how to travel rather than whether to travel at all. Bon voyage et bon chance!

*Come gather 'round people
Wherever you roam
And admit that the waters
Around you have grown
And accept it that soon
You'll be drenched to the bone.
If your time to you
Is worth savin'
Then you better start swimmin'
Or you'll sink like a stone
For the times, they are a changin'*

(Bob Dylan)



2015

Board Players

How Chairs, Independent Directors and CEOs make their boards effective

by Steve Wigzell (2005-To Date)

The characteristics, attributes and behaviours of board members and the chemistry between them, alongside the information they work with, determine the effectiveness of a board.

Playing for complications is an extreme measure that a player should adopt only when he cannot find a clear and logical plan.

Alexander Alekhine

We have seen these roles performed with great distinction. Where that has not been the case, it has usually been an issue of understanding rather than capability. People have either misunderstood the true nature of the board’s link in the corporate value chain or they have held a misguided view about the purpose of the board role they occupy. Once identified, these matters are easily resolved but it is obviously better not to get there in the first place. If this short document helps any one do that, then producing it has been worthwhile.

Our firm’s interest in the work of boards was stimulated nearly two decades ago by clients articulating the challenges they experienced when interacting with their own boards and, in some cases, stepping up to them. What started in the privacy of one-to-one coaching gradually migrated to board facilitation, especially at off-sites; and, as the UK Corporate Governance Code gained traction, to carrying out independent board effectiveness reviews as well.

The Code itself deserves to be a first port of call for everyone that has an interest in good governance and board effectiveness. Overseen by the Financial Reporting Council, it is based on the principles of accountability, transparency, probity and a focus

on sustainable success over the long term. The Code addresses key components of effective board practice, grouped under five headings: leadership, effectiveness, accountability, remuneration and relationship with shareholders. It is not a straitjacket: rather, its exhortation is to comply or explain. The Code has been almost universally adopted by corporate entities and most of its guidance has been adapted for use in the public and voluntary sectors too.

There is no point in duplicating the Code’s content here. Rather, we have chosen to map our own experience of board work onto the three board players whose individual and collective performance most impacts board effectiveness: The Chair, the Chief Executive and the Independent Director.

The Independent Director



The future belongs to he who holds the bishops.

Siegbert Tarrasch

Context

All directors have an equal duty of care for the continued good health of the host organisation, today and tomorrow. Formally, there is no distinction in law between a non-executive board director and an executive one. The same applies to an independent non-executive director and one rendered non-independent, either by dint of long service or being the nominee of an interested party, such as a shareholder.

Nonetheless, our experience is that the roles most pivotal to board effectiveness, and the most challenging to perform, are those of independent directors. That is principally because:

- The burden of independent scrutiny they carry can lead them to operate more as inquisitors and corporate policemen than is appropriate. The role of oversight eclipses the equally important role of guidance.
- To exercise informed, independent judgement and engage in constructive challenge, independent directors have to gain knowledge and insight from sources within and beyond the host organisation without going native. This can be a lonely, poorly signposted journey that requires dedication, persistence and, occasionally, ingenuity.
- They can easily be marginalised such that they make little impact on the organisation and its agenda.

Independent directors are greatly helped in the pursuit of their obligations by the transparency and openness of the executive team. By contrast, a defensive executive team that controls access to information and people, and is overly-sensitive to alternative input, is likely to get poorer value from its independent directors. They will be less well equipped to challenge and, if the chances of a dismissive or negative response are significant, become reticent do to so because the stakes are too high. They may resort to back-room gossip instead.

Best Practice

Two bishops are stronger than two knights or than bishop and knight, though very few know the reason for this advantage and how to turn it to account.

Richard Reti

We have found a number of best practices that are adopted by independent directors who rise to these challenges well. As an independent director, it pays to:

- Find out for yourself by walking the business, talking to a wide range of people, understanding the sector, looking out to the market place, and getting expert input.
- Be diligent, read a wide range of material and listen carefully.

- Check your understanding, ask good questions and persist until you get good answers.
- Form an independent perspective, avoid group-think and make up your own mind.
- Remember your duty of care to the business and its principal stakeholders. Ensure board and committee agendas give time and attention to the issues that matter most.
- Contribute constructively, make your own points concisely, explain where you are coming from, acknowledge and build on good points made by others, use neutral language and thereby generate light not heat.
- Work outside the board room as well as inside. Connect with others informally as well as formally so as to get to know key executives and other directors.
- Look ahead, re-educate yourself and upgrade your skills to keep current. Use your old war stories sparingly.
- Get good feedback and act on it.
- Know when its over. If you cannot subscribe to key decisions, or have reservations about how the board runs then stand down. When others take little notice of what you’re saying and/or you feel your ability to contribute has started to wane, then engage the chair’s help to leave on a high with the board’s goodwill towards you intact.

The Chief Executive



“The Queen is the most valuable and important piece and the whole outcome can depend upon how successfully she plays her role.”

Anatoly Karpov

Context

In our experience, the Chief Executive (CEO) has the power to make or break a board’s effectiveness. We’ve seen powerful CEOs dominate their boards and equally powerful ones enable and inform the board’s work. We’ve seen CEOs lead their executives into the board room, and others who don’t give an effective executive lead – and have no doubt that board effectiveness is enhanced by the former. We’ve seen CEOs who collaborate with the Chair to structure and support an annual board

calendar that brings all the important subjects to the table in an orderly and well-informed way; others who, meeting to meeting, cobble together an incoherent pot pourri of papers, briefings and standing items that suffer from insufficient preparation, coordination and forethought.

Board members, in general, and the Chair in particular can influence these matters; nonetheless, it remains surprising how tolerant some boards are of CEOs who don’t service them well.

Servicing boards can seem a waste of time and energy to busy CEO’s who occasionally complain that non-executives add little value, are quick to criticise and slow to praise, don’t bother to read the papers or get briefed properly and are more concerned about their own reputation than the organisation’s. Opinions such as these, even if held privately, have a way of expressing themselves to those who are held in some contempt. Even if the criticisms are justified (and we have seen places where they are), they rarely help change things for the better. The CEO has to help the board move to a better place, even if this takes time and patience.

It is also difficult for CEOs to act as “just another” director. Even if they can switch their hat for a director one, other board members continue to look to the wearer in his/her executive capacity. Simply put, it is hard to step out of the CEO role on your own board.

Best Practice

I didn’t picture myself as even a grandmaster...because I simply lived in one world, and the grandmasters existed in a completely different one.

Anatoly Karpov

In the context of a board and its work, the best things a CEO can do are:

- Invest in your board by, for example, organising elective briefings on topics of strategic relevance, taking directors off-site a couple of times a year to stand back from the day to day, and encouraging them to speak to your people. It pays back.
- Get to know your non-execs by spending 1:1 time regularly. As part of that, do some things together, such as seeing-is-believing visits and co-hosting stakeholder events.

- Show respect and regard for others and expect it in return. Welcome and invite comment and insight, and respond constructively to input even when you beg to differ. When your patience is tested, don’t let exasperation show. Remember that the board is your friend, not your enemy.

- Collaborate with your Chair to design and execute a strong board calendar that ensures all major topics are systematically brought to the table, in ways that comprehend the division of labour between the board and its committees. Prepare high quality inputs to stimulate high quality discussions.

- Lead your executive into the room. CEOs enable board effectiveness by delivering a report that covers all the main bases, identifies the issues and directs the Board’s attention to what matters most. They do this whilst ensuring other executive directors have air time and support them when things get sticky.

- Step out of the CEO role to speak as a director from time to time. Flag clearly when you are doing so. You should not restrict your board contribution to that of an officer of the business or feel you are on parade the whole time you are in the boardroom.

- Promote openness and transparency. Encourage non-executives to walk the business and tell them what is keeping you awake at night.

- Take options and questions to the board, not just answers and solutions. The board has a responsibility to guide the business as well as oversee it. You can use the talent and experience in the room to inform your thinking and influence the organisation’s direction of travel.

- Work with your Chair to configure the board, anticipating its future need for knowledge and skills, when planning succession. CEOs meet a lot of people, so you are well placed to identify and introduce contacts who might become good directors one day.

- Don’t let things fester. When a director has upset you, got the wrong end of the stick or said something inappropriate - or you have done that yourself - don’t let it rest there. Pick up the phone, deal with the issue and get the relationship back on track.

The Chair



“The King is a strong piece - use it!”

Reuben Fine

Context

The ability to adapt to changes in board membership and the organisation’s circumstances, planned and unplanned, seems to distinguish a good Chair from the also-rans.

Observing Chairs at work, the best of them achieve a strong, clear framework for the board’s engagement inside and outside formal board and committee meetings; and then facilitate relevant contributions from all board members. They have a constructive, open relationship with the CEO that falls well short of a job-share. They retain an independent, well-informed perspective and avoid going native. They are attentive to what directors feel and think about the board and the business it guides and oversees, and act on the intelligence they receive. They nip dysfunctional behaviour in the bud with a quiet, private word and, in a mature way, mentor new board members to help them make worthwhile initial contributions and avoid pitfalls.

When board chairmanship takes a wrong turn, it is usually because the Chair loses sight of what he/ she is really there to do, which is to ensure good stewardship of the organisation through running an effective board. It is a mistake to let relationships, however close they are, and commitments to past decisions, however good they were, compromise this duty of care. These worthy loyalties are misplaced.

The day a Chair feels the need to spend a lot of time in the business to keep track of how things are going, he is tacitly acknowledging that others are not performing as they should. When that begins to happen, he has started to lose the plot.

Best Practice

The great mobility of the King forms one of the chief characteristics of all endgame strategy... We must therefore develop him, bring him nearer to the fighting line.

Aron Nimzowitsch

As Chair:

- Be clear about what the business most needs from its board; what the business needs from its chief executive; and, in relation to those, what they both most need from you. These needs change over time, so revisit the subject periodically.
- Do your job and insist others do theirs. The board needs strong contributions from all its directors, especially committee chairs and the Chief Executive. Help them shape up and ship them out if they don’t make the grade.
- Run a good agenda at every meeting and across meetings. Ensure those agendas are the ones the organisation needs its board to address; and that the discussions about key topics and decisions are the ones the board deserves to have.
- Don’t let the Chief Executive dominate the board, treat it as a necessary irrelevance or be economical with the truth. The CEO is the board’s agent, to whom it has delegated executive authority for running the business: it has a right to expect openness, transparency and respect in return.
- Be alert to the possibility that independent directors may feel marginalised by the way you and the CEO manage the board. Stay close to your directors, find out what they really think, take notice of what you hear. Use that intelligence to make appropriate adjustments in the way the board and its committees work and how the board’s relationship with the executive is operating.
- Build a board for tomorrow, not just for today. Anticipate the skills, knowledge, experience and qualities tomorrow’s board will need and keep a constant look-out for potential candidates. Engage the CEO in that process. Use the flexibility offered by annual elections to retire directors whose currency has waned– the days of everyone serving three three-year terms are over.
- Focus your board on “tomorrow”. It cannot influence “yesterday” and it is too late to affect “today”. Insofar as the board spends time looking in the rear view mirror, then it should be to draw lessons from the past that are relevant to securing an attractive future.
- Don’t go too soon. It takes a full annual cycle for a Chair to get his/her feet firmly under the table; another year or two to refresh the board’s membership and embed changes in the agenda, structure and style of the board and its committees. Once the new way of operating has been established, it deserves to run for a while.

- Don’t stay too long. Chairs, like most of us, seem to lean on old, familiar ways. If you find yourself regularly saying or thinking “we’ve been here before” or “we looked at this a few years ago” then it is probably time to think about succession.

Working Together



“It is not enough to be a good player... you must also play well”

Siegbert Tarrasch

Context

Guiding and overseeing an organisation, so that it is successful today and tomorrow, requires the collaborative interaction of all the board’s players. They need to understand that board effectiveness depends on the nature of their interactions, not just on how they fulfil their own roles. Making an added-value solo contribution is necessary but insufficient to deliver an effective board. Every director has to help other board members contribute well inside and outside the boardroom. The Chair, CEO and Independent Directors play different roles within the team, but it is one team.

Where we see a board’s dynamic operate in ways that lead to its whole being less than the sum of its parts, this is rarely attributable to wilful dysfunctional behaviour on the part of directors. More often, it is because the board’s formal and informal processes for doing its work are inadequate; and/or there is personal antipathy between some board members; and/or the Chair, CEO and independent directors are not performing their roles as they should. Addressing the last of these is usually pivotal to sustainably resolving the others.

Best Practice

*Sit there for five hours? Certainly not!
A player must walk about between moves, it helps his thinking.*

Alexander Kotov

If the whole board is to operate more effectively than the sum of its parts, then the Chair, CEO and independent directors should:

- Enjoy full, frank and constructive dialogue inside and outside the boardroom.
- Share what you most need from others so as to fulfil your own role. Ask what they most need from you.
- Find out what and how others can best contribute, encourage that contribution, acknowledge it and build on it.
- Allow time and space for discussion. Build on other people’s comments before starting down another path. Resist any attempt to rush the agenda in the name of efficiency.
- Ensure the margins of board and committee meetings allow sufficient time to socialise and use that time well – don’t spend it making calls and reading emails!
- Invite feedback about your own contribution from time to time. Give each other positive feedback when warranted. If you have constructive criticism to make, do so privately not publicly.
- Ring the changes. Swap seats, sit next to someone else. Change the venue from time to time. It is surprising how changes in a board’s ritualistic routine can improve its dynamic.

A Final Thought

We have already said that mutual respect between the Chair, Chief Executive and Non-executive is a necessary condition for board effectiveness. They don’t have to like each other.....but it really helps if they do!

The Chess Masters

The Grand Masters quoted are:

Alexander Aleksandrovich Alekhine

a Russian chess grandmaster and the fourth World Chess Champion. He is widely considered one of the greatest chess players ever.

Siegbert Tarrasch

one of the strongest chess players and most influential chess teachers of the late 19th century and early 20th century.

Richard Réti

an Austro-Hungarian, later Czechoslovak chess grandmaster, chess author, and composer of endgame studies.

Alexander Alexandrovich Kotov

a Soviet champion, two-time world title Candidate and a prolific chess author.

Anatoly Yevgenyevich Karpov

a Russian chess grandmaster and World Champion from 1975 to 1985 when he was defeated by Garry Kasparov.

Reuben Fine

an American chess grandmaster, psychologist, university professor, and author of many books on both chess and psychology.

Aron Nimzowitsch

a Russian-born, Danish chess master and influential chess writer. He was the foremost figure amongst the hypermoderns.



PRAESTA INSIGHTS

2015

Knowing the Score

What we can learn about leadership from music and musicians

by Peter Shaw and Ken Thomson

1. Music, work and leadership

Organisations are complex. Leadership is challenging.

One way to approach the challenge of leadership is to learn from other fields. Often, those are sports grounds or battlefields. We watch and learn from the skill and concentration of a golfer or the competitive edge of a great football team. We hear how generals use leadership to create a sense of purpose and shared commitment in pursuit of a campaign strategy.

Work is about more than winning games or battles. In the following pages, we focus on leadership as helping people perform together, creatively.

Seen in that way, music *is* what work can be: a challenge to be competent and then excellent; to combine our efforts with those of others; to create something together that we could not do alone; to contribute and get something back; to communicate with our audiences; and to feel part of something bigger.

We see leadership, like music, as a discipline: as a contribution, and not a position in a hierarchy. Both leadership and music demand skill, knowledge and engagement. Both are developed through practice. Both can be performed in private and in public, in small groups, on large stages, and for a wider public. Both demand of us that we “know the score”.

We consider **conductors, orchestras and leadership**, and make the case for leadership as enabling as well as directive. The best conductors do more than choose the work and set the tempo: they create a space in which every player contributes to a greater whole.

We discuss parallels between **self-organising teams and chamber music** and what leaders can learn from how string quartets and other chamber musicians work together: that it requires good listening as well as playing your own part well.

We reflect on **rehearsal and performance**, and how leaders can work with teams to prepare them to do their best work together.

We consider **the part played by the audience:** those beyond the organisation, affected by its work, who

influence it – including, often, by paying for it.

Finally, we reflect on **“wrong notes”: things that get in the way of performing well**, and what leaders can learn from how musicians deal with them.

We illustrate each of these themes with examples drawn from “classical” music, because that is the music-making we know best; and we offer questions to help you see and reflect on parallels between the work of musicians and your practice and performance as a leader.

We hope leaders of all kinds will find something relevant and useful here, whether your work is paid or voluntary, and whether as the head of an organisation or a team, or as someone who wants to create something new by influencing a few people close to them or in much wider systems.

All of us can appreciate and learn from the skill, teamwork and creativity of musicians.

2. Leadership and music as disciplines

Leadership is creative. Leaders contribute and influence others to create something that did not exist, or encourage people to work and relate to each other in new ways, for new ends.

Leadership is a discipline, not a position in a hierarchy. Leaders acquire skill and experience through practice. Like music, leadership happens in private as well as in public, and in small teams as well as larger organisations. Both music and leadership demand of us that we “know the score”, and bring it to life.

We start our reflection on the parallels between leadership and music by considering music as another creative discipline. Perhaps you remember the first time you held an instrument, picked out a tune on a keyboard or set out to learn a song: the challenge of getting the notes right, and the feelings evoked by the music.

For some, that first encounter with music-making is the start of a lifetime of practicing and performing, as professional musicians. For others, music-making becomes a recreation: a way of re-creating not only sounds, but ourselves.

Similarly, you perhaps remember the first time you took the lead in your dealings with others, whether at work or in other activities. Nearly all of us lead sometimes, whether or not we are formally described as leaders.

Leadership, like music, is something we can practice and bring to our relationships with others, at work and in other parts of our lives. As leaders, whether or not we are active musicians, we can learn from music as a discipline: from how musicians learn their craft, and how they work with others.

Musicians learn from teachers, from instruction books, by listening to and watching better players, and, above all, by practicing. They understand the point made by Malcolm Gladwell and others, that mastery comes from hours of practice – as many as 10,000 hours.

Practice makes perfect

Learning an instrument, or learning to sing well, demands commitment, study and dedicated practice. A subtle musicians’ joke makes the point:

*“Can you play the violin?”
“I don’t know; I’ve never tried.”*

Like actors and athletes, musicians perform with their bodies as well as their minds. They learn the movements that produce a good sound, and the co-ordination of left hand with right, or breath, tongue and fingers.

By practicing, what seemed impossible becomes possible. Scales and arpeggios help musicians learn their way around the instrument or the vocal range. Working on studies, they train fingers, brains, and breath in the techniques and patterns demanded by composers. They develop muscle memory that allows them to focus on continuous refinement. Musicians work on a hard passage over and over again until they can play it right; or, for professionals, until they trust themselves never to play it wrong.

Musicians call these skills, “technique”. Leaders, too, learn techniques: for example, how to communicate influentially with individuals and groups of people and how to work with others to bring about change. These aspects of leadership involve technical skills we can practise. Improving them gives credibility and effectiveness to our leadership.

Musical development doesn’t stop when the piece lies under the fingers. Musicians continue to grow by learning to listen, bringing their minds to bear on what they are doing and how they could do it differently or better.

Similarly, as leaders, we learn to reflect on our own performance and development and to learn from our peers and from coaches and mentors.

As well as learning by doing, musicians learn the principles and history of their art and craft. Why do

some chords sound as though they bring a piece to a close, while others open the music up? Where do the different styles of music come from, and how did they develop, one from another?

Musicians and leaders both benefit from understanding how best they learn. Some prefer to be hands on, to learn by doing. Others want to understand the underlying principles and theory first.

Whichever approach to learning musicians prefer, music-making is about more than hitting the right notes and reading the right books. Musicians learn to put meaning and feeling into what they play: to put heart and soul into the music. They are engaged with their emotions as well as their technical capabilities. Leaders too need to put heart and soul into their work if they are to engage and influence others convincingly. Leaders can only truly lead if people choose to follow.

Musicians can learn technique and theory on their own, through practice and lessons. Like leadership, however, music is not a solitary discipline. Just as leaders work with others to create something new, musicians combine their technical skills to make music together: to listen to and co-ordinate with others, attending to what musicians call “ensemble” as well as technique.

In the following sections, we turn to music as a collective discipline. First, we offer some points to help leaders reflect on what they can learn from music as a creative discipline.

Points for reflection:

- How do we learn and practise new skills as leaders?
- Who are our teachers? Who gives us feedback on our performance? Whose performances show us ways to develop our own skill?
- How can we practise leadership more effectively in order to maintain and develop our skills?
- Do we practise enough, or are we getting by on sight-reading?
- Can we develop our understanding of the theory and principles of our work, as well as its daily practice?
- What can we learn from the history of our organisation or profession that will enable us to contribute more fully?
- What is the best blend for us of learning from writers and teachers and learning by doing?
- Do we put heart and soul into leadership, as well as knowledge and technique?

3. Conductors, orchestras and leadership

When we think of parallels between music and leadership, perhaps the first image to come to mind is that of the conductor holding a baton in front of an orchestra.

Those used to large organisations will recognise the structure and hierarchy in an orchestra. The different specialist players form sections, each with a leader responsible for quality and co-ordination. There are first violins and seconds, front desks and back.

Like members of other organisations, the individual players in an orchestra contribute their skill and expertise to create a whole greater than the sum of the parts.

How does a conductor lead these creative, skilled, individuals? There are as many ways to lead and conduct as there are leaders and conductors. Most conductors combine, in different ways, the ability to give direction with the capacity to enable others to contribute well.

Each of the conductors considered by Itay Talgam (see the box on page 8) drew great performances from his orchestras. Each found a leadership style authentic to himself as a musician. All of them carried authority and exercised power in taking decisions, whether over the membership of the orchestra, the interpretation of the music or in the simple act of summoning sound out of silence. Whether you agree with Talgam that conductors get the very best performance from musicians they treat as creative partners, it is worth reflecting how, as a leader, you combine giving direction and opening a space for contributions in how you lead.

Conductors: directive and enabling

In a fascinating and engaging 2009 TED talk, Lead like the great conductors, Itay Talgam describes the leadership styles of five well-known conductors. Talgam argues for the importance of enabling and engaging the players as creative partners, not simply giving them instructions. He compares:

- Riccardo Muti, impassively commanding, treating the players as “instruments, not partners”;
- Richard Strauss, composer and conductor, demanding strict execution of the detailed instructions in his scores, with little room for individual creativity;
- Herbert von Karajan, his eyes closed, his gestures deliberately imprecise, demanding that his players read his mind to discover his vision of the music;
- Carlos Kleiber, “opening a space for skilled, autonomous players to add a layer of interpretation” so that “control is no longer a zero-sum game”;

- and Talgam’s own teacher, Leonard Bernstein, starting from the meaning, enabling the players to become the storytellers and thus to share in leading the interpretation of the music.
- You might like to watch Itay Talgam’s TED talk and ask yourself which leaders in your organisation come to mind as he describes and illustrates these conducting styles.

The musician and writer Benjamin Zander acknowledged during his conducting career that the conductor is the only person on the stage who doesn’t make a sound. Whatever their style, all conductors depend on the players, as well as the players on the conductor. We suggested earlier that leadership is a discipline, not a position in a hierarchy, In an orchestra, and in an office, Zander suggests there can be leadership “from any chair”. There needs to be ownership at every chair of the purpose and quality of the overall performance.

“Leading from any chair”

In *The Art of Possibility*, Benjamin Zander describes how he came to see the importance for him as a professional conductor of enabling his players to “lead from any chair”.

I had been conducting for nearly twenty years when it suddenly dawned on me that the conductor of an orchestra does not make a sound. His picture may appear on the cover of the CD in various dramatic poses, but his true power derives from his ability to make other people powerful. I began to ask myself questions like “What makes a group lively and engaged?” instead of “How good am I?” [...] I began to shift my attention to how effective I was at enabling the musicians to play each phrase as beautifully as they were capable.

Zander found this approach led to better performance. Leaders in other fields often ask themselves “How good am I?” We might also want to reflect on how well we are enabling those we lead to contribute to the organisation’s performance. We might get better results from a more lively and engaged team.

Conductors, and other leaders, need to give direction in order to set standards, maintain focus and ensure results. To get the best results, they also need to engage those they lead, rather than simply requiring them to obey.

From this combination, leaders and conductors create the conditions in which those they lead can bring together their knowledge and skills to create something

together they could not do on their own. By giving direction along with freedom, and by creating that sense of contributing to a larger whole, conductors and leaders earn the respect, support and loyalty of players and followers.

“The Music Paradigm”

After becoming curious about how organisational development issues could be brought to life with parallels in orchestras, conductor Roger Nierenberg developed “The Music Paradigm”, described at musicparadigm.com and in his book *Maestro: a surprising story about leading by listening*.

Among the points brought out in a series of short videos on the website are the effects on professional musicians of a conductor micromanaging and giving mixed messages, and the positive effect of giving good directions and trusting professionals to act on them.

Something of the quality of the relationship between an orchestra and its conductor can be seen in how they communicate while performing. Some concert halls and TV broadcasts give the audience a player’s eye view of the conductor, and of the gestures, expressions and moments of connection in the music-making. A conductor’s eyebrows can be as important as the baton!

- Points for reflection**

 - What are the “conducting styles” of your organisation’s leaders? How do the “players” respond?
 - As a leader, what is *your* conducting style? How do you combine giving direction with opening a space for people to contribute?
 - Is your conducting style authentic to you? Does it get the best possible performance from your teams?
 - How are you going to enable team members to perform at their best?
 - What type of conductor of teams are you going to be in the future?
 - If an audience could see you “conduct” your organisation, what would they learn about you as a leader?

4. Self-organising teams and chamber music

Often, leadership involves creating and working in small, self-organising teams: for example, to generate ideas, make decisions or work to bring about

change. This creates challenges and the opportunities paralleling those musicians experience in chamber music.

Chamber musicians play without a conductor and one-to-a-part. Chamber groups are usually self-organising. Each player *is* a voice in the music and *has* a voice in decisions about how the music will be played. That isn’t always an easy experience. David Waterman, the cellist of the Endellion Quartet, says that “the communal nature of decision-making is often more testing than the decisions themselves”.

Similarly, there are times in other work when *how* we take decisions is as much of a challenge as the substance of the issues. Listening is always important.

The ego-busting art of listening

In *Together: the rituals, pleasures and politics of co-operation*, the sociologist and author Richard Sennett draws on his own experience as a professional musician to describe what happens when skilled individuals work together.

Young musical hotshots are often brought up short when they begin playing chamber music; nothing has prepared them to attend to others. (I was like that, aged ten.) Though they may know their own part perfectly, in rehearsal they have to learn the ego-busting art of listening, turning outward. It’s sometimes thought that the result moves to the opposite extreme, the musician blending in, submerging his or her ego in a larger whole. But sheer homogeneity is no recipe for making music together – or rather, a very dull recipe. Musical character appears instead through little dramas of deference and assertion; in chamber music, particularly, we need to hear individuals speaking in different voices which sometimes conflict, as in bowing or string colour. Weaving together these differences is like conducting a rich conversation.

People in organisations have the same challenge: how to combine their individual skills and expertise in a way that creates something greater than the sum of the parts, encouraging creativity and not imposing homogeneity.

When it works, chamber playing creates a special experience for players and listeners alike. Each player is a voice in a dialogue: sometimes leading, sometimes supporting, sometimes challenging or contrasting, sometimes commenting. The whole is greater than the sum of the parts.

Can we learn something about leadership from how that special quality of experience emerges from the individual contributions in chamber music?

Teamwork can be creative, not just people mechanically “playing their parts”. Even for musicians who know each other well, playing a piece they’ve played dozens of times before, each time is a new co-creation. Like the script of a play, the notes on the page are not themselves the music; they are the bones of the music, fleshed out anew by each performance.

In other fields of work, similar tasks and projects come round again. Leaders can help those playing their parts to come to each performance afresh.

All teamwork needs communication and co-ordination among the team players. Good chamber-music playing takes this to a high level. Though musicians discuss the music and its interpretation as they prepare their performance, communication in the act of performing is mostly non-verbal. Studying string quartets, psychologists Vivienne Young and Andrew Colman observed that the players’ “mode of interaction involves a degree of intimacy and subtlety possibly not equaled by any other kind of group.”

This kind of non-verbal communication, the ability to respond almost instinctively to what others are doing, marks high-performing teams in other kinds of work. Leaders can look to develop this skill themselves, and in others.

Teamwork is enhanced when team members respect each other’s contributions and are open to others’ ideas and feedback. As the author and playwright Alan Bennett observed of chamber musicians, “it results in them doing a better job”.

“... it results in them doing a better job.”

Alan Bennett writes in his diary of the experience of working with a string quartet on incidental music for a film:

Striking about the musicians is their total absence of self-importance. They play a passage, listen to it back, then give each other notes, and run over sections again [...] And the musicians nod and listen, try out a few bars here and there, then settle down and have another go. Now one could never do this with actors. No actor would tolerate a fellow performer who ventured to comment on what he or she was doing – comment of that sort coming solely from the director, and even then it has to be carefully packaged and seasoned with plenty of love and appreciation. Whereas these players, all of them first-class, seem happy to listen to the views of anyone if it results in them doing a better job.

Leaders can learn from chamber musicians how to create the conditions for good teamwork: teams that organise themselves well, reach good decisions, communicate and co-ordinate as they perform, are

open to each other’s ideas on how to improve and, together, create something not possible by working alone.

Points for reflection:

- In the work you lead, what can people do as a team, that they cannot on their own?
- How are decisions taken in teams you work in or lead?
- When does the team’s work feel creative, when repetitive?
- How do members of the team communicate as they work together at their best?
- How might you enable, influence and support team members, including yourself, to bring the best out of each other?

5. Rehearsal and performance

Rehearsal is different from practice, and from performance. This is as true for leaders and organisations as for musicians; we can perform better with good preparation, and we can learn from how musicians prepare to perform.

Practice helps musicians learn new skills and keep them up to the mark. Where practice is solitary work on technique, rehearsal is collective and co-creative: it is the work the team does in order to be ready to perform for an audience.

“Rehearse, rehearse, rehearse.”

Martin Elliot is Co-Medical Director at Great Ormond Street Hospital and one of the world’s leading paediatric cardiothoracic surgeons. He is a musician, and has operated with Mozart or Miles Davis playing in the operating theatre. He brings to life his presentations on leadership and improvement in surgical teams by showing how they have learned from other high-performing teams whose work demands speed, accuracy and co-ordination: Formula 1 racing teams, the Red Arrows and the dancers of the Royal Ballet. He sums up much of this learning in a single phrase: “rehearse, rehearse, rehearse”.

What effect does rehearsal have on people in a team? Having observed string quartets and others in action, psychologists Vivienne Young and Andrew Colman suggest that the presence of other players or an audience enhances the execution of well-learned skills, but holds back the learning of new skills and the execution of imperfectly learned skills. If the

individual players have sufficiently mastered their instruments and their parts, rehearsal and performance may well take the music to a new level. If not, the players might benefit from practice: rehearsal and performance may hold them back.

There are parallels in other work. We should be confident about the part we shall play so that we contribute well as the team prepares to perform. We should prepare together to perform well: “rehearse, rehearse, rehearse”.

What can other teams learn from what musicians do in rehearsal? Once again, it seems that listening is as important as playing. By listening in rehearsal, musicians find and develop relationships among their parts: who will take the lead and who will follow. Not all orchestral co-ordination comes from the tip of the conductor’s baton. Ensemble emerges from the understanding the musicians develop in rehearsal of how their part interacts with others in a larger whole.

Similarly in other work, watching and listening is as important as what we say and do. In preparing teams to perform well, leaders are not simply issuing instructions; they are helping team members find how best to fit their contributions to each other.

Listening well

The sociologist and musician Richard Sennett on rehearsing:

Rehearsals are the foundation for making music; when rehearsing music, listening skills become vitally important, and in listening well, the musician becomes a more cooperative creature.

Leaders do more than co-ordinate activity. They create a sense of shared vision and purpose. Again, leaders can learn from how musicians do the same.

Most musicians come to a rehearsal already knowing the notes. Professionals will usually have played the piece dozens of times before. Conductors and players use the rehearsal to create the music anew together, developing a shared vision of how they want it to sound, what impression they want it to leave and what feelings they want it to evoke. No two performances are the same.

Orchestral musicians value the skill of a good conductor in making rehearsals creative, purposeful and engaging. By communicating a vision of the performance to the players, a conductor helps them think differently about the music. It might be done by describing technical effects or details of speed and dynamics; or it might be done through imagery, inviting a creative response from the players.

Rehearsal time is usually limited, and needs to be used well. The musicians may decide to focus on

key passages, or on establishing the tempo and mood for each movement. They may deliberately leave some passages alone, so that they will be fresh in performance.

Similarly, other teams may decide, as they prepare to perform, what they want to commit to in advance and where they want to be able to respond to events and each other as the work unfolds.

A good rehearsal builds rapport and understanding between conductor and players, and among players. Together they seek to bring the music alive. In a good rehearsal, the musicians are challenged and engaged through clarity of instruction and creative dialogue. They feel valued and want to give of their best. They feel part of something bigger and are ready to perform to a wider audience. They are mindful of the contribution of their colleagues and how each depends on the others.

For musicians working well together, rehearsal is more than technical preparation. It can be fulfilling in itself, creating the sense of being part of a skilled, creative team in pursuit of a shared vision. Leaders can aspire to create the same experience for those they lead, as they prepare to perform.

Points for reflection

- As a leader, how do you ensure that people acquire the skills they need in order to play their part well as members of a team?
- How do you prepare teams to perform: that is, how do you rehearse?
- As they prepare to perform, how do you ensure that people listen to each other, as well as have their say?
- How do you create and share a sense of vision and purpose for those preparing to perform?
- Do you ensure your team or organisation makes the best use of preparation time?
- Does preparation time build rapport? Do people enjoy it?
- Why would anyone want to rehearse with you?

6. The part played by the audience

Few of us, musicians or not, do our work without an audience of some kind, whether in the room or further afield. For most of us there are many audiences. Our work is influenced by and acquires meaning from its relationship with those for whom we perform.

Musicians play before many audiences, in the concert hall and beyond. The paying customers have committed time and money to be present. They want to be uplifted and entertained. They want to go away having felt their time and money has been well spent.

“A performance cannot take place without an audience.”

In A Musician’s Alphabet, the concert pianist Susan Tomes devotes the letter A to the Audience. She writes about the relationship between performers and those who come to hear them:

A performance cannot take place without an audience, and to make the performance feel like an event depends on the willing collaboration of the listeners [...] though listeners don’t participate in the performance, their close attention certainly contributes to, indeed largely brings about, a shared concentration which enables transcendental things to happen.

Similarly, commercial organisations perform to their customers; governments to their citizens; charities to their members and clients; and so on.

Musicians will be anticipating where an audience will be coming from and what is likely to “strike a chord” with them. They will be judging the mood in an auditorium and deciding how best to respond.

Similarly, those involved in customer relations and marketing gauge the mood and views of the audience for other kinds of performance.

The very presence of an audience can enhance the musicians’ performance, or give them nerves and stage-fright, or even do both at the same time.

Among the audience in the hall may be music critics with a column to fill. They bring assumptions and expectations about what makes a good “live” performance, something with a bit more in-the-moment edge and excitement than a studio recording; yet their reviews will be read and repeated well beyond the moment of the concert. The critical audience demands of performers that they balance risk and spontaneity with longer-term reputation. Critics demand much the same of organisations and their leaders.

Organisations and their leaders have a relationship with their critics, too. As for musicians, the relationship can be a challenging one.

Musicians play for other musicians. What will attract the best players to join this orchestra, or the best soloists to perform with it? How can performing with others enable musicians to develop their capabilities and reputation? Similarly, one audience for an organisation’s work is those people who might be attracted, or not, to work for it.

Creating rapport

Reflecting further on the relationship between musicians and audience, Susan Tomes describes how she creates rapport with the audience even before stepping onto the concert platform.

I sometimes sit in the dressing room between rehearsal and concert and make myself think about our listeners hurrying to finish up work, ironing clothes, instructing babysitters, preparing early or late suppers, making arrangements for transport and parking, how to meet friends. Imagining all this makes me realise how much care the audience puts into a concert. They think they are coming to spend an evening listening to me, but equally, I am preparing to spend an evening in their company.

Taking the time to put ourselves in the shoes of those who experience our performance helps create rapport and a good relationship with the audience for our work. It may also help us discern what we can learn from what might feel like indifferent or hostile responses from our audiences.

Points for reflection:

- What audiences are interested in what we do as leaders and in organisations?
- How do our audiences affect and shape our work?
- How do we combine pushing ourselves and taking risks with protecting and enhancing our reputation?
- What work do we want to do, for which audiences?
- How can we best create rapport with those who experience our work?

7. “Wrong notes”: things that get in the way of performing well

This section explores five challenges musicians face and how they respond. The same challenges arise in work contexts beyond music.

Background noise

Musicians are inevitably sensitive to background noise. Passing traffic, the gurgle of heating pipes, even the hum of lights, disturb the still of the music-room and the calm of the musicians. Distractions outside can produce inner tension and erode concentration. A musician’s practice can affect others, as anyone who has lived with a trumpeter or a drummer will know!

Sometimes, distractions can be removed or avoided. At other times, musicians need to be able to filter out the background noise, to maintain the quality of their concentration and their performance. Musicians who learn their craft in front of noisy crowds, or busking in the street, or in noisy blocks of practice rooms, develop strong powers of attention and focus. They can communicate and influence through the background noise.

Dealing with background noise

- Can you recognise distractions and remove them or learn to block them out?
- Can you develop ways of engaging people’s attention whatever may be happening in the background?
- How could you practice communicating with and influencing others in “noisy” environments?

Being present

Preparing to perform, musicians tune more than their instruments: they tune in to their own mood and readiness and those of their colleagues.

They may be conscious of conditions in the auditorium. Often, the arrival of the audience changes the room’s acoustics and the temperature—emotionally as well as physically.

They will be mindful of the work they did in rehearsal and how to bring it to bear on the performance to come. They will be aware of the audience’s expectation of a satisfying, perhaps outstanding, performance. They prepare to engage with the musicians around them.

Musicians develop the ability to be mindful of inner and outer states in preparing both musically and emotionally. They may develop routines to help them be, like athletes, “in the zone”. These may include concert-day rituals and reflective or meditative techniques.

Being in touch with one’s self and one’s surroundings before a performance – for example, a speech, or an important meeting – can be useful for leaders, as for musicians. For both, even a few deep breaths before performing can make a big difference.

Being present

- As a leader, do you take time to tune in to your surroundings and to other people?
- Are you mindful of your own thoughts, feelings and physical state and how they affect your performance?
- Do you have, or might you develop, routines to help bring relaxed focus to how you perform?

Learning, development and growth

Musicians may be used to a way of playing that works for them. They have built up a repertoire and can play pieces well without undue effort. Everyday life and the demands of performance crowd in on time for practice, reflection and development, but there is always more to learn: new repertoire, better technique, deeper interpretation. Musicians need to ensure that they continue to learn and develop, combining command of what they already know with stretch and growth; neither over-reaching their abilities nor accepting self-limiting beliefs about what is possible for them.

For musicians and for leaders, learning and development may come from working on new challenges or with new colleagues. It also comes from self-awareness and reflection on the journey of the musician or the leader: where am I now, what brought me here, what possibilities lie ahead?

Growing through our leadership

- Do you take time to reflect on how you continue to learn and develop as a leader, recognising what you and others do well and being willing to travel further?
- Do you identify and seek out those whose encouragement and challenge can enable you to extend your capabilities?
- Are you honest with yourself about self-limiting beliefs and how they might be holding you back?

Relationships

Musicians are human. Inevitably, differences and tensions arise in their relationships with their colleagues.

Sometimes, these can be creative and generative, opening up new possibilities for individuals and the group; at other times, they can be corrosive. Individual and “tribe” preferences can lead to conflict. As in any group of people working together, there can be rivalries and conflict as well as collaboration. Relationships within the orchestra and between the players and the conductor are subject to many pressures. There may be a growing feeling that some players, even though they are trying hard, are holding back the ensemble as a whole.

Part of leadership, for musicians and in other contexts, is to surface and discuss different expectations and intentions early so that they don’t harden into resentment.

Getting the best from relationships

- Do you encourage openness about expectations and differences in work relationships?
- In your work, do you and others name issues and expect people to talk about them in a grown-up way?
- Do your work relationships create space for both competition and cooperation in pursuit of a shared purpose?

Performance appraisal and feedback

If the last performance went well, the players can be “on a high” and might be a little complacent entering the next performance. If the last performance went less well, the players may carry some unease, frustration or even a desire to blame and recriminate. After a sequence of indifferent performances, players may feel stuck in a rut, and a loss of energy and a sense of creative adventure. When musicians carry their emotional reactions around with them, it can inhibit them from being at their best in future performances.

It can take an act of leadership – from any of the players, not necessarily the conductor or the person “in charge” – to recognise what a group is carrying and persuade, inspire or cajole its members to shift to a different way of thinking, feeling or being.

Learning from performances

- In your work, are you able to assess each performance, learn from it, then draw a line and move on?
- Are you mindful of your emotional reaction to your last performance and aware that these feelings can stay with us, sometimes without us realising?
- How might you be less captured by emotional reactions of frustration and disappointment?
- Do you stay aware of the risk of complacency after success, and dissatisfaction and a feeling of being stuck when things have not been so good?

8. Music, work and leadership

Introducing these reflections, we suggested that music is what work can be: a challenge to be competent and then excellent; to combine our efforts with those of others; to create something together that we could not do alone; to contribute and get something back; to communicate with our audiences; and to feel part of something bigger.

We hope the material here has helped you reflect on parallels between the work you lead and how musicians engage each other and their work, and that your reflection stimulates you to lead, engage and influence others in fresh ways. We wish you well as you embark on future performances, ready to lead creatively and “knowing the score”.

Reflecting on work and music:

- What skills are you developing through competence to excellence?
- How well do you combine your skills and creativity with those of others?
- As a leader, how do you provide direction and create space for others to work well together?
- What in your work speaks to a wider audience?
- Are you part of something bigger, contributing your leadership to a higher purpose?



PRAESTA INSIGHTS

2017
The Resilient Team

by Hilary Douglas and Peter Shaw

Introduction

At Praesta we focus on helping organisations to achieve sustainable change. Ideally, that means a partnership approach, including work with leadership teams. Concerted senior team effort has the potential to influence motivation, performance and culture for the longer term, whilst the impact of individual leaders risks fading with their departure.

In this Insight document we share observations from working with executive and senior teams over many years and through changing contexts. We set out ten characteristics we notice in teams that stay resilient. Our suggested factors for success are not intended to be comprehensive: our aim is to stretch team thinking about what is possible.

The Changing Context

Expectations on leadership teams in all sectors are heavier than ever. There are stakeholders and regulators to be satisfied, reputations to be protected and always the finances to be watched. The pace of events is such that there is constant pressure to make rapid judgments and deliver at speed. There is a premium on a leader’s ability to anticipate what may be coming down the track. Transformational change becomes a way of life rather than a once- a-decade event. Resilient teams have a crucial role to play - particularly at the top of organisations, but also at any level where teams carry significant levels of responsibility.

We notice that teams which stay resilient:

- 1 Know what the team is for, and what can only be done by the team acting together
- 2 Balance planning the longer term and dealing with the here and now
- 3 Work together to turn plans into reality
- 4 Are proactive in response to a changing environment
- 5 Pay attention to values and behaviours
- 6 Engage effectively with stakeholders
- 7 Build capability for sustainable change in the organization
- 8 Understand and apply effective governance
- 9 Maintain momentum as team members change
- 10 Look after their own well-being.

We look at each of these characteristics in more detail below, and conclude with a linked list of ten questions for teams to ask themselves.

1 Know what the team is for, and what can only be done by the team acting together

When we start working with a senior team, we often ask each member how they would describe the team's purpose, and whether they think those above and below them would recognise the description. We sometimes find there has been no collective discussion about the team's purpose, because team members are too busy reacting to the pressures and deadlines of everyday business. Resilient teams discuss what the organisation and the wider world needs them to do, to fulfil the trust vested in them. They see teamwork as a route to high performance, not an end in itself.

These teams ask themselves: "What is important and can be done only if we act together, as a group or subgroups?"

When they address this question, they usually conclude that they are the only people who, by working together, can:

- set strategic direction for the organisation or their area within it
- work out and resource a forward plan, and actively manage risks to its success
- manage key relationships, upwards, sideways and externally
- build the capability of teams below them, so they can take delegated responsibility with confidence
- ensure that as a team they draw on their collective abilities and learn from each other.

Team members may go on to articulate what is important and can only be done by their leader - which will probably include coaching them individually and in a group, and ensuring that time together is focused on their priorities. The team are also likely to look to the leader to judge when discussion has to stop, and a decision must be taken.

Resilient teams are ruthless about asking if the team is adding value on a particular issue. They do not spend their time doing things which could be done by others, given the right guidance. If they are uncertain about others' capability, they focus on the motivation and performance management challenge. If decisions have to be taken about poor performance, they support each other in having the difficult conversations. Even in a crisis, they are very clear about where their input is most needed, and when they are at risk of getting in the way. They recognise when it is best to act jointly and when individually.

Warning signs:

- vagueness about the purpose of the team

- lack of strategic direction
- team members operate in silos.

2 Balance planning the longer term and dealing with the here and now

Successful teams know their reputation depends on effective day to day delivery, but they also know the risks of being in constant fire-fighting mode. Whatever the pressures, they insist on making time for reflection on the longer-term expectations which others have of them, and the capabilities they will need to get there. If they set aside time to stand back, they can, for example, think into a future where strategic goals have not been achieved and review what the derailers might have been. Answers often include an inability to read the environment, a failure to manage key relationships, or a delay in developing and motivating key people.

It may emerge that the goals are far more challenging than anticipated, and require the team to reframe their approach. The discussion allows the team to plan proactively for a better outcome, explore how to manage risk, and review where their collective attention needs to be.

Occasionally, teams run the risk that they enjoy 'blue sky' thinking so much that it detracts from managing the here and now well. Addressing current reality head on will always be critical for an effective team. The balance between strategic planning and operational delivery will vary over time, but it will always be 'both and' and not 'either or'.

Warning signs

- little sign of grip on day to day events
- lack of time for horizon-scanning
- failure to anticipate risks, and lack of contingency planning.

The team were overseeing a complex project which was constantly in the public eye. Tight delivery deadlines and a multiplicity of stakeholders meant they risked spending too little time looking ahead together. Their leader insisted on putting regular reflection time in the diary. On one occasion, the team imagined a future where they had not been successful, and brainstormed what the problems were most likely to have been. Some serious risks emerged, which they would not otherwise have thought of. The team agreed action to reduce those risks, and kept them on the agenda from then on.

3 Work together to turn plans into reality

Good planning amounts to little if it is not followed through. Resilient teams commission detailed planning and assure themselves that resources are in the right place, roles and accountabilities are explicit, and interdependencies are mapped. They define what success will look like, choose their performance indicators, and decide how to monitor progress.

Team members care about the collective goals, and put effort into joint problem-solving and cross-boundary working. They take collective responsibility and don't shirk difficult decisions. These behaviours run through every interaction, whether in or outside of the team meetings. Each discussion includes clear next steps, accountability for actions and defined expectations about progress before the next meeting.

Warning signs:

- decisions are not owned by the team
- the team is not clear about the management information it needs
- the team feels battered by external events and unable to move forward.

4 Are proactive in response to a changing environment

Resilient teams constantly scan the horizon and ensure they have the capability to change course if the situation requires. They ask the difficult questions of themselves, learn from mistakes and move on. They face into difficult issues and do not ignore them or run away from them. They help each other to think things through calmly and to judge whether rapid action or a more measured response will win the day. There is an old Army saying: "plans are worthless but planning is everything." When the unexpected happens, you have to be ready to adapt to the new reality. The original plan may have to be dropped or amended, but the process of planning will have provided a good understanding of what levers can be pulled, and how fast.

Effective teams accept that a change of plan requires more than a new set of tasks. People in the organisation need to understand why something different is now being asked of them. External commentators need to be persuaded of the reasons for a change of direction. Good communications are as essential in this context as on a battlefield.

Warning signs:

- plans are rigid and inviolate
- external commentators are ignored and dismissed
- hints of complacency are evident.

5 Pay attention to values and behaviours

Teams are made up of a set of successful individuals, each with their own personalities and each with their own strengths and weaknesses. They will not naturally form a collaborative group; indeed they may each instinctively prefer to do their own thing. Yet if asked about great teams they have been part of in the past, most will say they enjoyed being part of something bigger that everybody cared about. Time and again they identify the importance of mutual trust - or at least enough trust to air their differences and take a constructive approach to resolving conflict.

Trust does not happen overnight. Team members need to work at it, knowing they will be more effective as a result. Key ingredients include:

- acknowledging the risks of groupthink, or domination by the loudest voices
- being open to challenge and taking strength from each others' input
- listening with curiosity to what others have to say, and acknowledging when others have better ideas
- showing genuine interest in where others are coming from and how to get the best out of each other.
- working with the preferences of different personality types to get best results: for example, ensuring that the more expressive members of the team give the quieter personalities space to share their ideas.
- being self-aware and welcoming feedback on how others experience them
- learning together and coaching each other in a culture of continuous improvement
- living by a set of shared values or behaviour norms, and modelling these to others
- giving each other authority to challenge in group discussions, according to the agreed values.

To summarise, these team members are committed to each others' success, because this commitment gives the team as a whole the best chance of succeeding. They combine the humility to learn from others with a clear sense of personal responsibility.

Warning signs:

- negative gossip and backbiting
- absence of mutual trust
- unwillingness to share when things don't go well.

Two senior teams from different organisations needed to work more effectively together. Trust was at a low ebb. They came to a facilitated session with a huge degree of scepticism. The breakthrough came when they were asked to describe their hopes and frustrations - and discovered these were almost identical. They realised they were more likely to succeed if they collaborated on the shared challenges. They began to work on a joint agenda, building trust along the way.

6 Engage effectively with stakeholders

It is not enough for the team to work well together. To achieve their goals, they need to influence others, whether commissioners, funders, shareholders, customers or regulators. Each team member may work with their own set of relationships, but at the strategic level there is value in taking a systematic look at the key stakeholders together.

Team members pool their insights into the drivers and success factors for each stakeholder, and what it would take to build good collaboration with that person or organisation. They recognise it may not be enough to have a compelling logical argument in order to win some stakeholders over. It may be more important, for example, to offer an organisation something that enhances their external reputation, or to give a group of customers the satisfaction of knowing they have been heard. Team members agree who will take the lead in each of the relationships, how others can contribute, and which relationships can be delegated. They ensure that if there are multiple interactions with the same stakeholder, the message remains consistent, and everyone is kept informed.

Warning signs:

- lack of consistency in external messaging
- a haphazard approach to stakeholders
- the customer is tolerated and not embraced.

7 Build capability for sustainable change in the organization

It goes without saying that successful organisations need highly motivated employees, with the mix of skills to match future challenges. If the leadership team do not pay attention to this, no one else will.

Building capability requires understanding current strengths and development needs, and predicting as far as possible what future requirements may be. Recruitment, training and succession strategies follow - with the team members expected to set an example

in effective coaching and performance management. This may involve team members recognising a need for refresher training in managing difficult conversations, so that they can coach others.

When seeking to motivate others, senior team members need to recognise that individuals' drivers and views about success may be different from theirs. Some people care most about career progression, while others want to develop new skills. Most want to feel valued at work and to know that their managers see them as people, not task machines. Achievements need to be celebrated, not taken for granted.

Expectations on individuals and teams must be clear to everyone, and result from open discussion about priorities and resources. They should be reviewed regularly in the light of new developments.

When there are changes in prospect, nearly everyone feels apprehensive. They want to know about the big picture and the reasons for change, but they also want to know what it means for them as individuals. They need to be assured that managers are not hiding anything, that there will be opportunities to share in shaping the future, and that people will be treated fairly.

An effective team develops the narrative, speaks with one voice, and devotes time to answering people's questions through every available means of communication. They recognise the shadow they cast as a team and that others will be mirroring their approach and behaviours. Trust is again the key word. People will go a long way for leaders they trust.

Warning signs:

- expectations are vague and not communicated clearly
- training and coaching are not embedded in the team's approach
- succession planning is given a low priority.

The senior team led an organisation of technical experts. In a fast changing environment, the business needed to change its traditional ways of working, but the team knew they would meet passive resistance. They took time out, and imagined what it would feel like to be different groups of employees and managers: what would motivate each group, what would they be worried about, and what might they most need from the leadership? The exercise felt strange at first, but was helped by team members who had once worked further down the hierarchy. It led to some big changes in their engagement strategy.

8 Understand and apply effective governance

Effective governance is necessary for senior teams to ensure they comply with their legal duties, but it goes much further than that. Accountabilities are written down and are unambiguous. A well-planned forward agenda encourages focus on the team's priorities, and ensures that less important decisions are not delayed by being referred upwards. An agreed format for written papers supports good decision-making. Fit-for-purpose processes and policies mean teams can avoid wasting effort on returning to first principles on every issue. Decision-making and monitoring is supported by the right data, in usable form. The chair brings all discussions to a conclusion with recorded actions, and everyone abides by the decision outside of the meeting.

Members of effective teams regard their meetings as productive, because they are focused on the things that only they can do. These teams are not afraid to invite scrutiny from time to time from independent observers - indeed they value the insights this can bring.

Team members expect their own performance to be judged by their contribution to team success, and by their leadership of the teams supporting them.

Warning signs:

- papers and meetings are unplanned
- external scrutiny is seen as an unnecessary diversion
- governance and oversight is seen as mere bureaucracy.

9 Maintain momentum as team members change

It is not unusual for a strong team to lose momentum when one or two key players leave. There can be a sense that everyone has to start again, and even that there is no point in starting until the gaps are filled. Resilient teams spot the trap. They keep their good practices going because they cannot let performance stall.

The continuing members give even more attention to supporting each other through the transition. Their values and ways of working are a critical part of the induction of new arrivals - whilst welcoming the fresh perspectives that new colleagues can bring. Dynamics, insights and ways of working change with different personalities but the underlying purpose remains.

Warning signs:

- teams revert to silo working whilst waiting for vacancies to be filled
- new team members feel their views are unwelcome
- too much harking back to the 'good old days' - or too much rubbishing of the past.

10 Look after their own well-being

Teams in demanding situations are under constant pressure. They need to sustain the physical and mental well-being of all their members, for the sake of the whole organisation. Exhaustion and stress in a senior team are a drain on everyone's vitality and rarely lead to good decision-making.

All teams need a conscious strategy for recharging batteries as a team and as individuals. Team members watch out for each other to ensure each member gets downtime. They look for danger signals, such as frequent 4am emails, or emotional outbursts. Team success matters so much to them that they instinctively move to support a colleague in difficulty.

Warning signs:

- there is competition about who works the longest hours or takes the shortest holidays
- instant reactions prevail over considered responses
- time for team reflection is given low priority.

Key questions for teams to ask themselves

- 1 Do we all agree on what the team is for and where we need to focus our collective attention?
- 2 Are we taking enough time to think about the future, alongside this week's challenges?
- 3 Does the organization see us focussed on delivery together, and taking collective ownership of decisions?
- 4 Are we flexible in responding quickly, when circumstances change?
- 5 Are we explicit enough about our values and behaviours?
- 6 Do we need to take a strategic look at how we engage with stakeholders?
- 7 How do we best engage our people, and build future capability?
- 8 Do our governance arrangements serve us effectively?
- 9 When team members change, how do we ensure that momentum is enhanced and not diminished?
- 10 Are we truly committed to each others' success and wellbeing? What are the consequences if we are not?

PRAESTA

Praesta Partners LLP

43 Berkeley Square, London W1J 5AP

Tel: +44 (0)20 7907 2450

www.praesta.co.uk